

FROM PURDAH TO PARLIAMENT

By the same author

CRITICAL SURVEY OF THE URDU NOVEL

LETTERS TO NINA

BEHIND THE VEIL

KOSHISH-I-NATAMAM



In presentation dress, 1938

FROM PURDAH TO PARLIAMENT

By

BEGUM SHAISTA S. IKRAMULLAH

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TO MY HUSBAND
who took me out of Purdah
and has regretted it
ever since

Foreword

I CONSIDER IT a privilege to write the foreword to the book of Begum Shaista Ikramullah. Very close relations have existed between our two families for the last four generations. The grandfather of Begum Ikramullah, Maulana Obaidullah Al-Obaidi Suhrawardy, who was the Principal of the Madrassa Alia and one of the great scholars of Dacca, was a personal friend of my great grandfather, Nawab Sir Abdul Ghani; and my maternal grandfather, Nawab Sir Ahsanullah. Her maternal grandfather, Nawab Syud Mohammed was also a great friend of my family. He belonged to one of the old aristocratic families of Dacca. He was a brilliant conversationalist and wit, and an Urdu writer and author of great repute. His essays in the well-known journal, the *Oudh Punch*, had the same satirical humour as Akbar Alahabadi's poems. Sir Hassan Suhrawardy, father of Begum Ikramullah, materially helped me in the start of my public career. Begum Ikramullah, in spite of the official position of her husband, was a comrade in the struggle for the achievement of Pakistan.

The book, *From Purdah to Parliament*, is an extremely interesting account of a Muslim lady brought up under old Islamic traditions and culture, acquiring modern education at the same time, and gradually emerging as a modern, educated woman taking not only a prominent part in the social life of pre-partition India, but starting with political propaganda at social parties and finishing up as a member of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. At Delhi, her house was one of the rendezvous of Muslim leaders and at her dinner parties one met politicians belonging to various schools of thought

FOREWORD

where brilliant conversation was an additional treat to the excellent cuisine. I remember one such dinner at Delhi where half a dozen of the most important conversationalists were gathered together and it was one occasion when I enjoyed the conversation even more than the food.

I remember the author as a young girl in school who was allowed to appear before me at her father's house because of the relationship between the families and because of her extreme youth. I have thus really seen her coming out from Purdah to Parliament.

KHWAJA NAZIMUDDIN
Second Governor-General of Pakistan
and President of the Muslim League

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Quaid-i-Azam M. A. Jinnah

With Salma, Naz, and Inam

With my husband, Sarvath, Naz, Salma and Inam

Ceremony of Mirror and Koran, and Putting Ring on Finger,
at Salma's Wedding

Muslim Women's Society First Federation, February 1941

Deputy Chairman of the Pakistan Delegation, 1956-57

With Mrs Pandit at the UN

After receiving PhD, University of London

With the Queen, Pakistan Stall, British Industries Fair

Sir Hassan Suhrawardy, my father

Nawab Syud Mohammed, my maternal grandfather

With Shaheed Suhrawardy, Shahid Suhrawardy and my husband

Introduction

I OFTEN FEEL that I have lived through three distinct Eras. This may sound impossible, but the fact is that I was born before the last vestige of Mogul civilization had quite disappeared from the Indian sub-continent. My childhood was spent in the heyday of British Imperialism and the early years of my youth coincided with the period when the struggle for independence was gathering momentum. I had the privilege of getting into the arena as the struggle progressed and of witnessing the liquidation of an empire and the heralding in of a new state, a state born out of the dreams and desire of one hundred million people, welded into a nation by their spiritual need and economic necessity.

These years are crammed with events and crowded with personalities. Memory cannot hold that picture for very long. I feel a great desire, an urge, to put it all down on paper, to sort things out and to see them in perspective. And, if while doing so, I can catch and convey a fraction of the colour and movement of the great panorama I have been privileged to witness, I shall be very happy.

CHAPTER I

An Old-Fashioned House (1915)

I WAS BORN in Calcutta in my maternal grandfather's house. It was a very old-fashioned house, built in the style of Muslim houses of the nineteenth century. It was sold when I was only eight years old and my mother had not lived in it continuously after I was two, but she visited it a good deal and so I can remember it very clearly and can describe it almost room by room.

It stood in a narrow lane off the main road. (It was considered in very bad taste to have a house from which the main thoroughfares of the city could be seen.) There was a small unpretentious gate which opened into a long gallery. At the end of the gallery at the left was a door. This opened into yet another uncovered gallery which turned into a courtyard. All around the courtyard were the various living-rooms. These rooms were grouped together with a deep verandah running the entire length of them and each group formed a separate unit. In a large house there would be a dozen or so such self-contained units, but as my grandfather's house was not very big there were only four or five of them. To the right of the courtyard was the largest. It had a very large, deep verandah, which consisted of small living-rooms. These verandahs were the equivalent of drawing-rooms in a Western house. The rooms were quite small and were used more or less as dressing-rooms or for storage purposes.

One sat and did one's sewing and reading, ate *pan* and received visitors on the verandah. The most important piece of furniture here would be a large *takhat*. These were raised wooden platforms, covered with an embroidered or woven

material, or only with clean white sheets. They had elaborately carved or lacquered legs, very often of silver. On special occasions *masnads*, that is richly embroidered velvet carpets, would be placed over them. *Takhats* were always placed against a wall and had several bolsters scattered over them for one to recline on. A *pan-dan* (large spice box) was always to be found on one side of the *takhat* from which every member of the family helped themselves to *pan*. Of course, every member had her own small spice box and several of these would be found dotted on the *takhat* throughout the day.

The *takhat* was, literally, the stage of all household activities. Ladies sat there making and eating *pan*, cutting *chhalia* and gossiping. The more industrious ones brought their sewing or embroidery and stitched their daughters' trousseaux while listening to the gossip. Even shopping was carried on from there, for women vendors brought their goods and spread them at the foot of the *takhat*. Children also had a corner for themselves and their toys would be found littered all over it.

Besides *takhats*, there would hardly be any other piece of furniture on the verandah; Muslim houses did not begin having furniture in the English style until much later. Wardrobes had only just begun making an appearance and, if there were any, they would be found in the small living-rooms. English-style trunks, were also coming into fashion, but were still a novelty. Most belongings, therefore, were still kept in large wooden chests.

Besides the large *takhat* for sitting on, there would be a *chowki* (a small, low, wooden platform) on one side of the verandah for saying one's prayers. Quite near it would be placed the shining, pot-bellied goblets in which water for ablution before prayer was kept. As most of the ladies said their prayers five times a day, it was necessary to have the water at hand. Keeping these vessels filled was the duty of the innumerable maid-servants.

Drinking water was also kept in earthenware jars on a

lacquered and carved wooden stand in another part of the verandah. In a hot country, the convenience of having drinking water at hand need not be emphasized. So it came about that vessels containing water for drinking and washing were to be found in what was the equivalent of a sitting-room.

The smaller verandahs were arranged more or less in the same manner. There was one used exclusively by young girls as their sitting-room, for they were not supposed to make themselves too conspicuous even inside their own home and would not be found in the large verandah but in one at the side. There was a verandah for the servants alongside the kitchen and a long gallery where all the old pensioned-off servants lived. I remember at least half a dozen or so such old servants living in my grandfather's house when I was a child. It was because we looked after our old servants that the need for old age pensions and old people's homes did not begin to be felt in our country until recently.

There was an upper story and another completely self-contained apartment with courtyard, kitchens and servants' rooms leading from the main part of the house. But, as the windows of some of the rooms opened upon the lane, only young married couples were allowed to live in this part of the house. It was not even considered suitable for young unmarried girls to go there. The young matrons would come to the main part of the house after their housework was done if they wanted company; but they were rarely visited in their own domain for it was not customary for the elders to visit the young. It was the duty of the young to come and pay their respects, while young unmarried girls were not allowed to go visiting on their own at all.

The house was old-fashioned and behind the times and the life that was lived in it was no less out of date. My grandfather, Nawab Syud Mohammed, belonged to an old aristocratic family and he never came to terms with the new rulers or the way of life they brought with them. His ancestors had come

from Iran and settled down in Dacca at the time of the Mogul Emperor, Faruk Saiyar. They were men of wealth and position and are mentioned as such in standard works of that time like *Tarikh Nusrat Jangi* and Bishop Heber's *Memoirs*. They prided themselves on the fact that, though they had lived for several generations in India, they had married only into families of birth and status similar to their own.

Dacca had been one of the outposts of the Mogul court and had become a sort of enclave of Mogul culture in Bengal. On a small scale it had all the refinements of living that were to be found in Delhi and Lucknow. Families such as Nawab Syud Mohammed's regarded themselves as custodians of the Mogul culture and guarded it jealously as a precious possession. This made them rather isolated from the rest of the people in the Province of Bengal and their social life was confined to a narrow circle, while for marriage they most often had to go to the families outside Bengal or to other enclaves of Muslim culture there, such as Murshidabad, Midnapore and Shaista-bad. Nawab Syud Mohammed, or Nunne Syud as he was called in his youth, was married at the age of seventeen to his cousin, a beautiful girl of fifteen. After two or three years of blissfully happy marriage she died in childbirth. The family fortunes had also reached a very low ebb by then because Nunne Syud's eldest brother, who had come into the estate when a very young man, had, as is the wont of young men, picked his friends unwisely and, in consequence, lost his fortune rapidly. He died fairly young, but one of his daughters lived till I was fifteen. It was from her that I heard most of the family history and a good deal about the manners and customs of that period. She was a wonderful raconteuse and could make the past come to life. In the long winter evenings she used to sit with us children, cosily tucked under her warm soft quilt (*razai*), and tell us about her childhood and youth, of times when life was gay and colourful, how she used to sleep on beds that were covered every evening with fresh flowers,

how in the summer, in the moonlight, they went sailing in *bajaras* (small sailing boats) on the Padma river, how they celebrated *I'd* and with what ceremonies marriages were performed.

But Nawab Syud Mohammed had to forsake this way of life at the age of twenty-two and come to Calcutta with his maternal uncle, Mohammed Mirza. Calcutta was then the capital, the centre of progress and home of the newly prosperous. Nawab Syud Mohammed lived there for the rest of his life but I do not think he ever really felt at home in it. He was, however, almost immediately discovered by Nawab Abdul Latif.

Nawab Abdul Latif is to Bengal what Sir Syed Ahmad Khan is to the rest of Muslim India. He is the man who realized that the British had come to stay and the sooner the Muslims came to terms with them the better. Therefore, like Sir Syed, he entered Government service himself, sent his son to England to study for the Bar and did everything in his power to encourage education among the Muslims. Nawab Abdul Latif was charmed by my grandfather—this sad young man, scion of an old family, now so completely at sea. He married him to his daughter and persuaded him to take up Government service. Nawab Syud Mohammed, though he had had the best possible education in the old style (he learned calligraphy alone for seven years), knew little English, but the passing of examinations was not then necessary to secure Government positions. The British were keen to encourage men of good families to enter their service and nominated them to high posts.

So Nawab Syud Mohammed became a Deputy Magistrate, the highest post open to Indians at that time. He later became head of a department, one of the first Indians to achieve that distinction. He was the recipient of many titles and honours from the British but he never really became reconciled to their way of life nor did he cease to regard his joining the government service as almost an act of collaboration. He thought the

'W.O.G.' was something ridiculous and in his essays in *Oudh Punch*, the well-known literary magazine of the time, gave vent to his real feelings. These essays are priceless specimens of ironic humour and are merciless and accurate portrayals of the times, which today take on an added significance since they show how the pendulum had swung from complete non-co-operation to abject and slavish imitation.

Nawab Syud Mohammed perforce had to accept certain things for himself and his sons, but he was determined not to accept them for his womenfolk. They were kept in the strictest purdah and even visits from women were restricted. The dress-makers, the bangle sellers and other women hawkers, who must necessarily be allowed in, were regularly vetted by the *derwan*, or doorkeeper; no strange woman could gain entry. Nawab Syud Mohammed did not consider the womenfolk of the new-rich of Calcutta fit company for the ladies of his household, so they never went visiting or received any calls except from relatives. The people my mother and aunt knew best, outside their own home, were their two aunts, stepsisters of their mother, who were about the same age as themselves. Their father, my mother's grandfather, Nawab Abdul Latif, was dead and their mother was not so strict with them. Coming in contact with these girls was the nearest my mother and aunt came to seeing anything outside their own extremely secluded existence.

My mother's education followed the orthodox pattern. She was taught to read the Koran by one of the many distant relatives who lived in the house. In a household like my grandfather's these ladies occupied the position of super governesses or seamstresses. They did the same sort of work as governesses in European households, but enjoyed a slightly better status. The fact that they were related was never forgotten; they had their meals with the family and were consulted, at least formally, on all family matters. They made one or two of the children of the family their special charge and became responsible for everything pertaining to their welfare and education. The

children, in their turn, became very fond of their special aunts and, when they grew up and had a household of their own, their favourite aunts were assured of a place of honour in it and, in due course, took charge of the children of the children they had brought up. It was a very graceful way of solving the problem of well-born women with no income.

After learning to read the Koran, girls were taught to read and write in Urdu but were not encouraged to delve very deeply into literature; but such was the atmosphere that they picked up a good deal of literary appreciation from their brothers. Cooking and sewing were considered the important items of a girl's education and, here again, one of the aunts was put in charge. Music was not taught for unfortunately it had fallen into disrepute, but girls picked up a great deal because it played such a part in everyday life and no ceremonial or festive occasion was complete without it.

Nawab Syud Mohammed had seven children, two daughters and five sons. His eldest daughter-in-law was his wife's niece and had been brought up in his house. The daughter of his eldest brother also stayed with his family. My mother and aunt said that he was fonder of them than of his own daughters, and at least they enjoyed many more privileges and favours. Their dress allowances were larger, they received more costly presents, were privileged to give their opinion on matters of family concern and had a greater say in everything than his own daughters. On his daily visits it was to them that he addressed himself first. But in this, as in everything else, Nawab Syud Mohammed was being true to the tradition of his time and class. Those who were dependent should be treated with greater courtesy and kindness so that they should never feel their position. It did not matter that children of the house went without, but guests should not have anything less than the best. This rule was extended not only to guests who came for a short time but to those who came and made their home with the family for good.

Though Nawab Syud Mohammed's fortunes had dwindled to nothing, there was not a time when there were not three or four such guests in his house. Some of them were old and ill and needing a lot of attention. Nawab Syud Mohammed saw that they got it, for it was the tradition of the house that they should be waited upon with all courtesy. My mother was his favourite child and the most beautiful of his children. Although a girl, she was not only like him in features but in build and carriage as well, but even she was not allowed any latitude. It used to amaze us when she told us how it took her father quite a long time to get over the fact that she had once cooked a dish which needed sixteen pints of milk with only eight and then served that 'mess' to him as *muzâfar*. He was horrified that a daughter of his should not know the difference between *muzâfar* and porridge. He always said that such bad taste, such lack of appreciation in a child of his was truly appalling, for Nawab Syud Mohammed regarded a breach of good taste in matters of dress and food of almost equal importance as breaches of good conduct. He was shocked if he heard one of his sons had not paid his debts, but it shocked him no less if one of them could not distinguish between various flavours in mangoes.

It was said that one of his sons actually plucked up sufficient courage to refuse a marriage suggested by his father and that he wrote his refusal. His father exploded, as was to be expected, but he was not much more furious at his son's audacity in having refused an alliance suggested by him than at the sight of the writing paper (on which this 'piece of impudence' was written) which had been torn off so carelessly as to have a jagged edge. If the children sought permission to do something and were told, 'This is not done in our family', they knew that their case was hopeless. To his children, not only the family tradition but he, himself, was the law. 'That a son of mine should do this' or 'that a daughter of mine should fail to do that' was, to his mind, the greatest reproach he could

administer to any of his children, and they themselves regarded it as such. He judged every action by the yard-stick of his family tradition, which took precedence over every other code of conduct. He worshipped at no other shrine and paid homage to no other gods than the god of his own family tradition.

Nawab Syud Mohammed lived by the values of a vanished age and, what is more, he so impressed these virtues on his children that they all clung to it and thus failed to come to terms with their world and, because of this, became, by worldly standards, failures. All of them, that is, except the youngest, Syud Hussain, who reached great eminence as a fiery young writer and politician and who, after India's independence, became Ambassador to Egypt. I shall speak about him later.

Those who saw Nawab Syud Mohammed when young men are now old themselves, but they remember him as the 'last of the Barons', a grand old man, white-haired but still extraordinarily handsome. As it was not customary to be on intimate terms with one's elders, they knew him only very slightly but they remember him as an extremely gracious person, full of old-world courtesy. These young men were sons of old friends so he was extremely nice to them and showed great concern for their comfort and saw that they were entertained and taken great care of when they were visiting him. They recall many acts of real consideration and thoughtfulness. Nawab Syud Mohammed might appear unbending and autocratic, but he was not really so. He belonged to an age that had vanished and the civilization he was bred in had crumpled to dust before his eyes. He loved that civilization and clung to it, desperately, and to be able to do so he had to be uncompromising.

My cousins, that is to say his grandchildren, who were old enough to have been taken notice of by him, still remember him as somebody who, though rather awe-inspiring, was

extremely interesting and always made them laugh. His personality had left such an impression, not only on my mother but on all his other children, that I feel I know him very well. When my mother talked about him I felt that I could almost see him and hear him admonishing his children in measured phrases. His conversation with them seemed to consist entirely of admonitions; but, since he was always ironically witty, sarcastic and clever, although, they withered under it, they could not say that it was boring.

His children not only respected and admired but loved him very deeply. I have often wondered at this, as the relationship between them seems to have been on such a formal basis. He visited the *zenana* (women's quarters) once a day at a stated time, and his entry into the *deorhi* was announced as ceremoniously as any other visitor. When he had taken his seat, the ladies presented themselves one by one. *Dupattas* well over their heads, eyes downcast, they sat and spoke only when spoken to. Still, I cannot help feeling that they enjoyed his visits very much and looked forward to them as the peak event of the day. Stern and uncompromising on principles though he was, yet he had a great tenderness for his children, especially for his daughters and nieces. If they were not well and happy it perturbed him greatly. Though he saw them so little he knew exactly what they were like, which one had inherited his temper and who was of a gentle nature, who was ambitious and who had a contented disposition. My mother said that it used to surprise them very much when, by a casual remark, he showed that he had guessed at their inmost thoughts. He not only had an ironic wit but a delightful sense of humour as well, which showed itself in dealing with small children.

To compromise on principles was a great sin, according to Nawab Syud Mohammed, and so it remained a cardinal sin for all his children. They rejected adjustment and discarded 'give and take' as compromise and so they continued to live in a changing world by the values of one that had vanished.

I do not think I have ever met a woman like my mother. I know that is what every daughter feels but, quite objectively, I have never met a woman like her, for she did not belong to her own age—she belonged to the age that her father had seen vanish. On the other hand, my father belonged not only to the present but to the future. While she looked back, he looked forward. And so it was that I was brought up in a home which was at the same time a very modern one and yet one in which the values of an older world still held sway.

CHAPTER II

In a Modern Home (1919-1922)

MY FATHER was one of those visionaries who always see ahead of their contemporaries. He was born and brought up at a time when the old-established customs were crumbling away and a new concept of life and a new mode of thought were beginning to find favour amongst his countrymen. His family traditions and background also contributed towards giving him a reformist outlook. His father, Obaidullah Al-Obaidi Suhrawardy, was a pre-eminent scholar of Arabic and Persian, known and respected throughout the Indian sub-continent. But while most scholars of that time were extremely antagonistic towards English education, he was an advocate of it. He went to the length of learning English rather late in life and was amongst the founders and the first Principal of Dacca Madrassah, a boys' school of the type of the English grammar school.

He died comparatively young, leaving a large family. My grandmother, however, had been so imbued with his ideas of education that, despite many handicaps, she decided to continue to educate her children. She had to return to her home in Midnapore, but she decided to send all her four boys as boarders to Dacca. It was still a very rare thing to do this and my grandmother was subjected to much adverse criticism by friends and relations.

It was also an expensive undertaking for an inexperienced woman behind the purdah and with very slender means. But my grandmother must have really believed in education for she sold her jewels and most of the few pieces of land that she possessed to be able to educate her sons. Her courage nearly

broke when her eldest boy died at the end of a brilliant academic career and after securing a Government scholarship to Oxford. But her sacrifices were finally rewarded and her other three sons lived to achieve distinction. My father and his brothers revered their mother greatly and were extremely mindful of what she had suffered and sacrificed for them. In their attitude to her there was something almost akin to worship. I was almost ten when my grandmother died so I remember her quite well and remember a number of little incidents which firmly implanted this impression in my young mind.

The other person who had a great influence on my father's life was his eldest sister, Khujista Akhter Banu Begum. She was a pioneer of women's education in India, founder of two girls' schools and author of several books. The story of her education is rather interesting. She was only eleven when her father died but he had implanted such a love of learning in her heart by teaching her Urdu and Persian himself that, as there were no girls' schools as yet, she got her young brothers to continue her lessons in Persian and in English. She acquired great proficiency in both these languages. She could speak and read and write English fluently and translated several novels into Urdu from English. In Persian, as far as I am aware, she is the only woman to have been given a Degree of Honour by Calcutta University and to have been the examiner in Persian for M.A. in the same university.

Besides her intellectual attainments, truly remarkable for that time, she was a person of great sweetness of character and disposition. Everyone I have met who knew her seems to have loved her. Her home was a haven for my father and uncles, and she gave them encouragement, advice and help. Her husband, who became a High Court judge later on, was a struggling young lawyer at that time and she had young children of her own; but her brothers' welfare was and always remained her chief concern. They, on their part, absolutely

adored her and even after her death she remained the most important person in their lives, a sort of guardian angel of the family whose conduct and behaviour had established the standards for the family for all time. To this day, all the girls in our family are given her name as their second name as a mark of respect to her memory.

And so it was that my father grew up in an atmosphere of puritanical austerity and high idealism. But this did not make him rigid and narrow; he had a temperament and gift for friendship, a liking for and appreciation of the good things in life and this made him a very warm, likeable and human person.

He was married fairly young as was the custom in those days. He was still a medical student and he completed his studies after marriage, then went to England for post-graduate work. He stayed over two years taking the M.D., D.P.H. and F.R.C.S. degrees; he was the second Muslim from the sub-continent to receive the degree of F.R.C.S. and amongst the very few Indians. On his return he was given a lectureship in the Calcutta Medical College and soon established a flourishing practice, for, even before proceeding to England, he had gained a reputation as a brilliant surgeon and many years afterwards, when had abandoned medicine for politics, his colleagues never ceased regretting the loss of one who was considered a genius in his own profession.

At this time other Higher Services were just opening their doors to admit Indians, and my father was persuaded by his family to accept a post of District Medical Officer in the East India Railway. So it came about that I spent most of my early childhood in the pseudo-English railway colonies. I do not remember going there, but my earliest recollections begin with our house in Lilloah. Lilloah was a small residential suburb seven miles from Calcutta, of the type that was to be found outside every big city in India. The English did not like living in the congested parts of cities; therefore, outside

every large city there would be open areas known as the *Chhaoni* or Civil Lines. Here there would be no bazaars, hardly any traffic, in fact none of the bustling, colourful activity that characterizes the cities of the East. The quiet lanes, well-trimmed hedges and well-kept gardens with wicket gates, all helped to create the illusion of an English garden suburb, and the mentality and attitude of those who lived in these parts were also suburbanly correct; but, of course, I was not aware of this till much later.

We had a very nice house and a really lovely garden, both of which my father kept in very good condition. This was the stage when Indians went in for extreme Westernization in every way, particularly those who joined the Service, which so far had been reserved for the English. They felt that it was their incumbent duty to prove to the Englishman that they could emulate him to perfection. This attitude may sound absurd now but at that time it did not seem so; it was considered to be synonymous with progress. Our house, therefore, was furnished to look exactly like an English house. In the drawing-room there were the heavy sofas, fender stool drawn near the fire, lace curtains looped up and tied with corded silk, gleaming brass and silver and various other knick-knacks displayed in cabinets. The dining-room had a fairly massive sideboard on which was displayed a lot of heavy silver. The hall and study were also furnished in the typical English style of the times and so were our bedrooms. The servants wore uniforms similar to those worn by the servants of English people, complete with gloves, cummerbund and monogrammed *pugris*. We had afternoon tea with hot buttered toast and even at other meals we ate what was called 'English' food which I now realize was a mixture of English, French, Portuguese and Indian culinary efforts. My mother did not like English food, so there would always be Indian dishes at the table cooked by her personal maid and these we ate with much greater relish than the so-called 'English' food.

In a house such as my grandfather's there would be a full complement of men as well as women servants and the men of the family would be in charge of the male staff. But in a modern house like ours there were no separate apartments for ladies and it was not possible to have a duplicate establishment, besides which my mother could not get any of her maidservants from her old home to come out to Lilloah. They considered it unseemly to go and live where only the *ferangis* lived. 'Poor Chhoti Begum,' they said. (That is what they called my mother. It means 'younger lady'.) She had married a young man with queer ideas and he had taken her to live among outlandish people. They felt very sorry for her. 'How dull it must be', but they regretted they could not share her exile. The only one to agree to defy convention and come was our nurse. She did so because she loved my brother and me far too much to be separated from us, and after we were grown up and did not need her as a nurse, she stayed on as my mother's personal maid.

Despite the fact that she kept strict purdah from the men-servants, my mother ran the house very well. She gave all her orders through two small boys called the *chhokras*. They brought her the account books to see, and through them she ordered the menu for the day. She saw to it that the food purchased was fresh and handed out the stores, in each case the boys bringing and taking things to and fro. It sounds difficult but it worked, and worked fairly smoothly.

My brother and I both spoke English even as very small children for we had nursery governesses from the time we were babies. We dressed like English children, my brother in shorts and shirts and what is known as 'Eton suits', I in frilly muslin frocks and starched pinafores with my hair tied with ribbons. We played with English children who introduced us to Beatrix Potter and Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes.

Each year at Christmas time we went to a children's party at the 'Club'. There there would be a huge, glittering Christ-

mas tree and a resplendent Father Christmas to hand us out our presents.

I began going to school at Lilloah. I went to a small private school which was run by a middle-aged English lady with two other ladies to help her. It was run exclusively for English and Anglo-Indian children and I was the only Indian child in it. Miss Gasper, the headmistress and both the other teachers belonged to the old-fashioned school. Our studies were essentially English; I learnt about Alfred and the Cakes, of the Hundred Years War, of Good Queen Bess and of the Iron Duke. I did sums with English money and English weights and measures and learnt to read through books written for English children. But I was not an exception in this matter; many of my generation were being educated in this way. What was unusual in my case was that alongside this anglicized life the orthodox pattern continued, and though I went to an English kindergarten I also started to read the Arabic Primer with a view to learning to read the Koran at the traditional age of four years and four months. There are thirty chapters in the Koran and it took me three and a half years to finish it. This was about the usual time. One is not taught to read Urdu separately but, as the alphabets are the same, by the time one finishes the Koran one has learnt to read Urdu also. Thus, by the time I was eight, I could read both Urdu and English.

CHAPTER III

Childhood (1922-1924)

MOST OF my childhood we lived in places similar to Lilloah; that is to say, in artificial English colonies where we followed the outward pattern of the English way of life. But, because of my mother, naturally the core of our home remained essentially orthodox and excursions into the old world were sufficiently frequent for me to come to know and love it. Whenever I visited my mother's family I stepped into the nineteenth or the eighteenth century. For though my grandfather had died no change whatsoever had come over the lives of the members of his family for many years. Whenever we were staying in Calcutta my mother visited her sister and aunts frequently.

There was not then the glut of social life that there is now, and so even an ordinary call was looked forward to with eagerness and undertaken with a certain amount of formality. The intention to visit was sent a day before through a maid. Use of telephones had not yet been accepted or become common, and although we had one, my mother never used it.

The usual time for the call was about three in the afternoon. Lunch would be early that day, after which my mother and I would dress very leisurely; the servants would be given careful instructions regarding their work during our absence and the *doeli* sent for. A *doeli* was equivalent to the sedan chair. It was customary for ladies to travel in *doelis* as it was carried right inside the courtyard and so there was no chance of even a glimpse of them being seen by outsiders while getting in and out of it. Travelling in cars was considered unladylike and, therefore, my mother, though we had a car, always went by

doeli. One could not see anything at all while travelling in one. There was a bit of coloured glass on one side for light, and even if it had not been at an angle from which one could neither see nor be seen, it was not much use, for the *doeli* was always covered with a most attractively embroidered curtain. It was absolutely essential that it should be so and even those who could not rise to a *ghata-tope* (curtain made to fit over the *doeli*), put just a plain sheet over it; but a lady never went out without one.

I enjoyed these visits very much for I was very friendly with my younger cousins and with the one nearest my age I had cemented my friendship in the usual fashion by arranging a dolls' wedding together. This was always an elaborate affair at which all the ceremonies performed in a real wedding were meticulously observed. The idea was to teach girls social etiquette and household arts, particularly sewing, for the doll's trousseau had to be entirely stitched by the girls themselves. I, being no good at sewing, wisely chose a boy doll. Our dolls had a long engagement and we had a lot of fun during that period.

There could not have been longer discussions about an actual marriage than we had about our dolls. Painstakingly over the year we collected household furniture, china and linen and as soon as we had acquired a new item we would beg our mothers to go and pay a visit so that we could show our new possession and talk it over; for, though we lived within walking distance of each other, we were never allowed to visit each other by just walking over. My cousins already observed *purdah*, and, though to my mother's great mortification my father still did not allow me to be put 'behind the veil', I certainly could not be allowed to walk on the road. Nor was it customary for girls to go visiting without their mothers, not even amongst their relatives, so we had to wait until our mothers felt like seeing each other. Luckily for us, they did want to see each other fairly frequently.

But I enjoyed these visits even apart from the pleasure of meeting my cousins, because the atmosphere in my aunt's house was so different from that in my own. Our home had been reduced to the manageable proportions of a Western home, but my aunt's household consisted of the usual large number of dependants, relatives and old servants which meant that there was always a great deal of noisy activity going on all the time.

There were so many things happening at the same time but on different levels. One could join the children who would be avidly listening to the story told by an old aunt with such a wealth of detail that it gave it an intimate personal quality. Then there would always be some minor domestic crisis brewing in which everybody was taking an inordinate amount of interest.

The maidservants played a considerable part in contributing to the liveliness of such households, and brought a touch of reality into this otherwise unreal world. They had been with the family for years and were as jealous of its honour and tradition as members of the family themselves. There was a well-established hierarchy amongst servants at the lowest rung of which came the servant girls. These gradually rose to a position of trust and responsibility and having been brought up by and amongst ladies acquired their manner of speech and had a surface polish and veneer. Such a person was Muna Buwa. She had come as a servant girl in the time of my great-grandfather and so now regarded herself as the doyen of all the maids. She was what one usually describes as a character. She had a crisp and terse style of speech and did not mince matters when speaking her mind. She did not hold with any of the newfangled notions, such as speaking English, reading magazines, going to school, etc. She disapproved not only of us girls, but even ticked off our mothers. They had just recently taken to visiting outside the family circle. This Muna Buwa considered absolutely *infra dig*. 'Imagine,' she would

say, 'Nawab Abdul Latif's granddaughter's *doeli* being hawked round from door to door. Who would have thought it possible?' Besides Muna Buwa there were several others, who had all given a lifetime of devoted service to the family and whose staunch loyalty was so touching that at times it became almost ridiculous. There was an old maidservant called Allah-Rakhi. She had also begun life as a servant girl in my great-grandfather's house. She had never graduated to the status of Muna Buwa, but she was mindful of family traditions in her own way. She never went shopping for even a trifling thing without recounting the whole genealogical table of the family for the edification of the shopkeeper.

Besides these old servants, who were an institution and an indispensable part of households such as my aunt's and great-aunt's, there were the women vendors, the *choori-wali* (bangle seller), the *bisatin* (women who sold ribbon, buttons, etc.). They came all day bringing a hundred and one attractive little things, perfume, *kajal*, *surma*, embroidered slippers, coloured powder for dyeing one's *dupattas*. But the selling of their wares was the least part of these women's jobs. Their most important role was that of purveyors of news. They were, in reality, the news carriers of the women's world. And so accurate and detailed were the accounts these women gave that, though visiting outside the family circle was not done until recently, my mother and aunts knew a great deal about other well-known families, such as which of their contemporaries had married and to whom, how many children they had, whether they got on with their in-laws or not and which of the daughters were of a marriageable age.

Because these women knew so much about a family's private affairs, only the ones that were very well known and reliable were allowed to come to the house. In fact, most of them were ex-maids and some of them did not even make a pretence of buying or selling anything but just came over frankly to bring and collect gossip. They had all the time in the

world and stayed a whole day or half a day at their ex-mistress's house giving a hand in any household task which needed some extra help.

And there were numerous tasks for which any extra help was more than welcome. Hand dyeing and hand printing were still carried on in homes. Gossamer *dupattas* of ladies and fine muslin *kurtas* of men were never worn unless *chunoad*, that is to say crimped. This sort of crimping was not done by tongs, but by pulling out a half-inch of material at a time between thumb and forefinger and twisting it. The use of sweet-smelling herbs was still in fashion. The sorting, pounding and preparation of them to be used as a base for cosmetics, shampoo, hair-oil and to be put as a sachet to scent one's clothes and linen took a lot of time. One of the sophistications of our life was having newly made, freshly filled quilts each winter. These were, of course, stitched at home. Hand-printed satin quilts, lined with silken soft muslin, which were dyed and herb scented, smelt delicious. They were filled with beaten-up cotton to a snowy lightness and then held in place with most attractive stitching. For all these tasks, an extra pair of hands was more than welcome and in the midst of it news was gathered.

My mother, living in 'English Colonies', was brought up to date as to the latest news by my aunts when she went to visit them. In fact, my mother would ask the *choori-wali*, the *bisatins* or *silai-wali* to come on the day she would be visiting Chhoti Nani so that she could buy whatever she needed and also hear all the news although she was temperamentally not very fond of gossip.

Besides these informal calls, there were a number of occasions for visiting in connection with innumerable ceremonies with which ladies 'behind the veil' seemed to while away their time. There was a ceremony to mark each stage of a child's life, for the ladies wanted any occasion for celebration so as to give them something to do.

Apart from the ceremonies connected with specific occasions, the most popular occasion for ladies to get together was for *Milad*. *Milad* is a ceremonious recitation of the story of the Birth of the Prophet. During the month of his birth, it is held as often as two or three times in the same week. But all through the year, every auspicious occasion is marked with the holding of a *milad*. It was particularly popular amongst the ladies of my mother's family, both because they were of a religious turn of mind, and because several of them were good at reading *Milad*.

Like every other ceremony, *Milad* had its own form and tradition.

The room in which it was to be held was cleared of all furniture and the floors covered with carpets or *durees*. In the centre, preferably on a raised dais, *masnad* would be spread for those who would be reciting the *Milad*. Silver stands with burning incense would be placed in front of them as well as vases of roses or other sweet-smelling flowers. During the recitations of a certain portion, corresponding to the singing of Hallelujah in *The Messiah*, everyone would stand up and rose-water would be sprinkled and *Ittar* sprayed on the assembly so that the air would be heavily laden with scent. The whole ceremony was charged with emotion—hence its great popularity.

The high-lights of the lives of women in purdah, however, were marriages. These were deliberately made into elaborate affairs to provide occupation and amusement for weeks. My mother and I, having been away from Calcutta a great deal, missed several weddings, but we happened to be present at R's wedding, the cousin who was my particular friend, and with whom I had the dolls' marriage when we were children. She was marrying another cousin, so it meant a double wedding in the family, and an occasion for still greater festivity, and numerous meetings amongst the ladies of the family. Clothes, jewellery, the dates for various ceremonies, would be the topics of conversation on these occasions.

These family gatherings before the marriage were of help in deciding the trousseau and jewellery and other wedding presents which the girl was to receive from her other relations. Then the jewellers would be called and various ornaments ordered, and the aunts and cousins present would say what they were going to give as a present so there would be no duplication and the expense of that particular piece of jewellery or silver would be saved for the parents. The girl received at least one or two dresses as presents from her near-relatives and this was made known during the time the trousseau was being gathered together. An aunt would mention casually, 'No, do not get this green brocade. I am giving her a *jora* of this material.' Another cousin would tell the mother, 'I am giving her a bracelet in the same style you liked the other day.' In this way the arrangements would proceed.

During these meetings there would be lively discussions as to the style and fashion of the bride's dresses. The younger ladies, particularly a young cousin of mine, who had a delightfully happy temperament and was all in favour of trying everything new, would suggest more pastel shades, or a new style in trimmings, etc. Her suggestions would be indignantly repudiated by the other ladies. 'For goodness sake,' they would say, 'you girls are becoming absolute *mems* [English-women]; even for a wedding dress you do not want to have bright colours and rich trimmings. If you had your way I dare say you would like to get a white gown.'

Azimi Apa would giggle and say, 'Phupi Jan, the girl would never wear this dress if you made it so gaudy', and eventually they would come to some compromise.

This was the time when we were going through what was called the modernization of our dress and jewellery. This was a great error in taste for we discarded dresses of beautiful material and exquisite embroidery, and gave away or sold beautiful old jewellery we would now give anything to have back again.

One of the mistaken notions women of the West have about our women is that 'the poor things' missed all the fun of shopping, but that was not so. Our women did not miss any of that great joy of Eve's life; only they had all the fun of shopping without having to push and jostle in a crowd and stand for hours waiting their turn to be served. For they did not go to the shops, the shops came to them. On *I'd* and the other festive occasions and whenever there was a wedding in the offing, jewellers, silk and cloth merchants and *gota-walas* were all sent for to bring their goods. Our shops did not go in for window dressing and, therefore, the ladies missed nothing by not going to the shops. The attraction lies in the beauty of the wares and not in the art of displaying them. These were brought to the house and the *takhat* on the ladies' verandah was turned into the most attractive of counters. It was fascinating to watch the process.

The silk merchant would come with two or three large bundles tied in white coarse cloth and carried on the heads of coolies. A mat would be spread for him on which he would dump the bundles and deftly begin to undo the knots. Still smaller bundles, tied this time in coarse muslin, would tumble out of the larger bundles. These were also securely knotted. In a matter of seconds these would be undone and the most gorgeous *saris* would spill out—*saris* in ruby red, emerald green, peacock blue and saffron yellow; *saris* with rich borders and *pallus*; *saris* with designs worked all over; *saris* stiff with embroidery; *saris* so soft that one could well believe that they could be passed through a ring—rolls of brightly coloured slipper satin would open out and fall in rich cascades at a few deft flicks of the wrist. Lengths of rich *kimkhab* would glisten and yards of gold and silver tissues would gleam. Such a feast of colour, such a profusion of richness, the eye could not take it all in, and, quite honestly, no shop window in later life has given me quite the thrill I got watching those heaped piles of silks and satins, nor can going and buying *chooris* (bangles)

from a shop where they are kept in neat rows be compared to the joy of peering into a *choori-wali's* basket where strings and strings of *chooris* were heaped and one could not keep one's fingers from touching them. I feel sad to think that my children have never seen the magic of that sheer feast of colour.

Maidservants would stagger in with piles of these gorgeous stuffs. My aunts and mother would put exploring fingers on them, feeling the quality, placing them against each other's cheeks for texture. Trimmings would be tried and matched, silks, tissue and *kimkhab* for pyjamas would be selected. At last the choice would be made and the rejected things would be sent back. Then while the *sari-wala* packed up his goods, the ladies would refresh themselves with tea after the exertion of 'shopping'. Pushing my way in department stores, I now often sigh for that leisurely shopping of 'behind the veil'.

All the sewing and stitching was done at home. Seamstresses were engaged for it, and the lady's maids knew how to sew, but the ladies themselves did a great deal of really fine sewing. Great ingenuity was shown in stitching the sachet of sweet-smelling herbs called the *sohag-pura* for the bride. This was made by an old aunt of mine who was really a beautiful needlewoman and I do not remember ever seeing a more exquisite piece of embroidery. The wedding preparations continued, and finally the wedding took place—the last one in our family in which the guests were confined exclusively to relatives, and so a much more intimate and enjoyable affair than the weddings of today.

And so I spent my childhood and early girlhood between the Arabian Nights world of my mother's family, and my ultra-Westernized home, and the English school. This dual existence did not seem to have worried me, and I used to slip easily from one to the other, as I can still do, only that Arabian Nights world of my childhood has all but disappeared.

CHAPTER IV

Early Education

MY EDUCATION, like everything else in my life, followed a dual pattern. As a child I began attending an English kindergarten, and was learning to read the Koran at the same time. After this, for some years I followed the usual pattern of a girl's education in my country in those days. That is to say the formal education of a girl being given actual lessons by teachers at set times, stopped after she had learnt to read the Koran and read and write Urdu. She received instruction in religious matters and would perhaps have been taught the rudiments of Persian, but she was supposed to concentrate on homecraft and needlework. Although the girls didn't go in for higher studies as such, those who had a literary bent, and wanted to, did acquire a wide knowledge of poetry, literature and history. This was possible because their homes possessed such an atmosphere that they learnt by just living in the midst of it.

For poetry is the breath of life in our society and literary discussions were the accepted and established way of spending one's leisure hours amongst the educated. In fact, the word 'educated' was, and is still, synonymous with being literary. Not only was it a mark of a gentlemen to be able to read and write poetry, the ladies also did so. In every family there would be at least one or two women poets. Fathers, brothers and other male relatives were always ready to encourage by explaining a difficult passage or lending the latest book of poems or criticism, so it was not very difficult for girls to develop their literary taste.

It was in this manner that I myself pursued my studies, and

though it may seem rather haphazard my generation of girls taught in this way did seem to know as much about our language and literature as those who now receive a more systematic education. In fact, we knew, and certainly had read, a great deal more thoroughly than the young people do now, because reading is no longer the sole recreation of children. Radio and the cinema now claim much of their leisure and even those who do read do not get the same mastery over literature, whether Urdu or English, because they rarely read a book twice, while we chewed and digested it so it became part of our thinking and our imagination, and we lived for days and months in the world created by the magic of the author's pen.

Most of the reading I did on my own; but whenever my father had time, he asked me to read aloud while he and my mother listened. I remember those evenings so well. We would all be sitting out in the garden, the air would be filled with scent, the heavy fragrance of *Mogra* flowers mixing with the clean, fresh smell of new earthenware *surhais* and *khas*. My mother would be reclining on a *charpoy* twisting *Mogra* flowers to wear round her hair and on her wrists, my father and brother sitting on wicker chairs. There would be enough light to read, and as the shadows fell, an oil lamp would be placed on a table which would throw sufficient light on the book and yet not break the magic of the twilight. My father would be listening carefully, correcting my pronunciation and explaining the meaning of words I did not know. A lively discussion would follow as to the merits of the book and the point of view of the author and whether or not he had been successful in the portrayal of his character. Such quiet and happy evenings are almost a thing of the past. Addiction to radio and cinema on the part of the children and the much heavier round of social activities on the part of the parents have put an end to it.

During this time I received hardly any regular teaching in

English because the places we were posted to were hardly better than villages, and it was not possible to get good teachers there. I used to have lessons from my brother's tutors until I was put in purdah and after that had a succession of English or Anglo-Indian governesses, none of whom was very satisfactory from the scholastic point of view. The obvious solution would have been a boarding school, but this was an unheard-of thing, and even a person as modern as my father would not have considered it. The only people who would consider doing such a thing were those who had no tradition at all and my father was certainly not one of those, for though modern in outlook he had a very deep respect for our own tradition.

But when we came for a fairly long stay in Calcutta in 1927 my father decided to put me in an English school. He chose a convent, Loreto House, which was considered one of the best English schools in Calcutta. I was delighted, for I had yearned to go to school. How satisfactory it was to be really learning at last. 'How good it is to have proper textbooks and not to be made to read from anything at hand,' I thought, as I hugged my lovely new pile of books with affection. But while I was revelling in being allowed to go to school, a storm of criticism broke over my poor mother's head, for the idea of a grown-up girl (I was twelve) going to an English school was considered outrageous.

All her relatives came to see her on a sort of condolence visit and commiserated with her for her misfortune in having got married to a man with such strange ideas. 'Honestly,' they said, 'we did not think that even he would go so far.' 'What will he do next?' 'Oh, you never know, he might take the girl to England,' one of them would add, making my mother turn pale with apprehension.

After several hours of this sort of conversation and much clicking of tongues, they would leave. It was, after all, not their affair. The discredit of my going to school, reflected,

according to our way of thinking, mostly on my father's side of the family.

Nor were my father's family unaware of this situation. My father's eldest cousin, who since the death of his sister had been regarded as more or less the most senior lady in our family, on hearing the news immediately came over to try and rectify the situation.

She first put me through a questionnaire about the school. 'Are there any men teachers?' she asked. 'Oh, no,' I said, 'none at all. They are all women and most of them are nuns.'

'But there must be menservants, are there not?' asked my aunt.

'Yes, there are but we do not see any. You see, they do not come into the classrooms at all. The only place they come into is the refectory and as Mother Superior, on Father's request, has given me permission to eat in the parlour, they do not see me and my car is allowed to go right up to the entrance hall. I do not have to get out at the gate like the other girls,' I added to reassure her further.

Having failed to find any shortcomings from the purdah point of view, she turned her attack towards another direction. 'It is a Christian school, is it not?' she asked. 'Yes,' I admitted, 'it is.'

'Well, then, do they not teach you their religion?' she asked.

'Well, not really,' I explained, 'non-Christians do not have to do Catechism, only the life of Christ.' I knew enough of my religion to know that it was not a sin, according to it, to learn about the life of Christ, for we regarded him as a prophet ourselves and I had learnt all that we were being taught on the subject in school already as part of my own religious instruction.

'But they make you say their prayers, do they not?'

I hedged. 'They do not make you say their prayers, but we all have to go to the hall where prayers are said.'

‘Well, there you are. That is attending prayers, is it not?’

‘Of course it is,’ agreed my mother. ‘The place is full of statues.’ (Idols is the word she used.)

‘Well,’ said my aunt, ‘I will have to speak to your husband about it. When does he come home?’

‘Well,’ said my mother, ‘he is staying in Lilloah still, you know, but he generally comes in just before dinner.’

‘Oh dear, that is a bit late for me. You ask him to come and see me,’ she told my mother.

‘Oh, I wish you would stay and see him,’ pleaded my mother, ‘you see, he is due to sail for England very soon and he is very busy and might not find time to go over.’

‘Ah well, I shall stay and see him, then,’ said my aunt. She realized it was a case of saving the family name.

My father came in the evening and was very pleased to see my aunt and went up and paid his respects to her and she gave him her blessings. After mutual inquiries as to health and other formal conversation was over, my aunt came to the point.

‘What is this I hear, Brother,’ she said in tones as if loath to believe anything so evil, ‘that you are sending your girl to an English school?’ She put a world of meaning in the word English.

‘Well, yes, I am,’ said my father. ‘What is the harm?’

‘For goodness sake, do you not realize what a lot of talk that is causing?’

‘I do not care for ignorant people’s talk. You see, Sister, I am only doing what everybody else will do in another twenty years’ time. Those who begin something new are always criticized, but if nobody had the courage to begin something new the world would never progress.’

My aunt had to get a fresh set of arguments. ‘What about the religious influence on the girl? Is it not dangerous to expose a child of tender years to such dangerous teachings?’

‘My girl is too well instructed in her own religion by now

for it to do harm to her,' said my father, fondly pulling me on his knee and stroking my hair.

'Oh yes, I am sure she is,' said my aunt, looking at me benevolently. 'May God bless her and make her take her aunt's place. But, Brother, we must think of her future,' she said in a meaning way.

My father immediately understood what she was hinting at. 'Go and do your lessons, darling,' he told me, giving me an affectionate shove, I went to my room which was next door and glued my ear to the door.

'Brother, how will you ever get anyone to marry her if you persist in sending her to school?'

'I am not going to marry her to a *mulla* or a *maulvi*, Sister,' replied my father, 'and the boys of today want an educated wife. That is an added reason, if anything, for educating girls. But, Sister, it is getting very late, come along, let us have dinner.'

'Oh no, I think I will go home now.'

'I would not dream of letting you go without having dinner with us. It is ages since you have been to my house,' said my father; and he really meant it, for Father was most courteous and respectful towards his older relatives.

My aunt, somewhat mollified, agreed to stay.

In 1927, my going to an English school was looked upon with much disfavour and yet by 1947 every girl of good family was going to school. What my father had said had come to pass and in another twenty years' time women were taking part in processions, had been to gaol, worked in refugee camps and were sitting in legislatures and participating in international delegations. It seems incredible, but it has happened.

But to get back to 1927 again. The criticisms continued without a break. My mother received visits of protest from every relation of ours. Even my father's youngest sister, a sweet, gentle, non-interfering person, was goaded by the

criticisms of the in-laws of her daughter into coming over and seeing my mother. She told my mother of all the talk that was going on. Ordinarily my mother would have replied in a spirited fashion, for she could not bear my cousin's in-laws, but by now she was reduced to such a state of nervous exhaustion that she even agreed to my cousin's husband coming and speaking to my father about it.

So, one evening, he came. My mother observed purdah from him but she had a sumptuous tea served to him, after which he waited looking solemn and disapproving, for, though a young man, he was very pompous. My father came just before dinner, as was his wont, and was rather taken aback at seeing this young man, for he very rarely visited us.

'Oh, hello!' he said, not too enthusiastically. 'Nice to see you. Will you have some tea?'

'Oh no,' my cousin's husband replied. 'I have had tea.'

My father sat down, concealing his impatience without much success, and tried making polite conversation. At last my cousin came to the point. He had heard news he could hardly believe.

'Really,' said my father, pretending not to understand him. 'What is it?'

'Oh, that your daughter is attending an English school; if true, this is a matter of disgrace for the family.'

My father's patience was at an end. He had put up with criticism from his seniors and members of his own family, for he felt they had a right to it, but having an outsider, and a much younger man than himself, criticizing him was a bit too much.

'Well, my dear young man,' said my father, 'I do not see why it should bother you; it will be a disgrace for my family, you know,'—putting an emphasis on 'my' which implied that he was not a member of the family and so it was presumptuous of him to interfere—'and now, if you will excuse me, I have only a few days left before I leave for England and I have a

lot of things to do and, believe me,' he said before getting up, 'in ten years' time every one of you will be sending your girls to school. I am only a little ahead of my time and therefore I have to put up with all this criticism.'

This was the last of the visits we had; at least till my father left for England.

After my father's departure I was left to face all the criticism, and it began to wear me out. After all, I was only twelve, and at twelve one is not certain of one's values. I began to feel that I was doing something that was unseemly and injurious and was disgracing the family, that it was due to my keenness for studies that father had taken these steps and that if I myself gave up the idea he would not mind my leaving school. I therefore stipulated that I would leave school provided arrangements were made for me to study at home. My mother promised that she would see that this was done. She was not at all averse to the idea of my studying, even though she did not understand my longing to do so, and though it was no use for a girl, she realized that it meant a great deal to me and was prepared to humour me in whatsoever I wanted even if it was something as unconventional as studying. Besides, women's education was not looked upon with disfavour in my family. What was objected to was going to an English school, and it was decided that I should study at home, but as things turned out, I did not resume studying for a long period, in fact I did not do anything very much for the next year or so as tragedy struck at us.

My only brother, who was now nearly eighteen, a handsome, intelligent and charming boy, developed tuberculosis and died within a few months. What his death meant to my parents no words can express. Light went out of their lives from that day and only my mother's deep religious faith and my father's deliberate plunging into work carried them through their ordeal. On my life it had many and far-reaching effects. My brother was not only an only son but an only

son among four brothers and the responsibilities and burdens of family traditions which should have been his had to be shouldered by me alone in future years. It had the immediate effect on my mother and other members of the family of withdrawing their objection to my going to school. They realized that, as my father now had no son, they had to agree to his educating me as one. It also resulted in my getting married comparatively early. My father would never have consented to that otherwise, but, as he felt that it was the one thing that would give my mother some happiness and bring some interest back into her life, he agreed.

When our lives had taken on an outward semblance of normality I went back to school and this time stayed on for nearly five years, though not without long intervals of absence. That I could complete my studies in school and even go on to college was due to the encouragement, help and understanding which I got from Mother Joseph Agatha. Under her guidance my mind seemed to open out and my knowledge widened. Mother Joseph Agatha taught me so much. Many of the values I hold today I learnt from her. She educated me in the real sense of the word and at the same time taught me the meaning of education. She made me travel in the 'realms of gold' and introduced me to the treasures of English literature and to the proud history of her people.

No better teacher of history, no better disciplinarian and educationist, no greater lady have I yet met than Mother Joseph Agatha. She came from a very distinguished English family. She had been born a Protestant and had adopted the Catholic faith at the age of nineteen. But the nun's habit did not succeed in hiding the proud carriage of an aristocrat, nor did twenty-five years in religion succeed in quelling the fierce pride of class and race.

But besides enjoying my studies, I enjoyed my school in other ways also. It was very pleasant to have daily companionship of girls of my own age and I gossiped and talked with

them on the same subjects and in the same way as they did themselves. Film stars, cinemas, and the Royal Family were favourite topics of conversation, and though these subjects were completely remote from my personal experience and knowledge, it did not prevent me from airing my views on them with as much confidence as my companions.

When in school I wore a school uniform of blue skirt, white blouse and navy blue tie, but the moment I got home I changed into *kurta-pyjama-dupatta*. In fact if my mother had visitors, I was not allowed to appear for one single moment before them in what she considered 'half-naked dress', but had to come up the back stairs and creep into my room and change into my own costume. This was typical of my dual existence. I talked, behaved, and felt like an ordinary English schoolgirl while within the four walls of the school, but at home with my mother and amongst my other relations I was expected to behave as a traditionally well-brought-up Muslim girl.

I stopped wearing English clothes because my eldest uncle Sir Abdullah Suhrawardy accidentally saw me in them, and expressed disapproval. This was sufficient for my father to ask me to discontinue wearing English clothes in the future. It may seem strange that my father should have deferred so much to the wishes of his brother, who was, after all, not so very much older than himself, but family ties were still very strong, and though we lived apart from the rest of the members of the family, and my father was in no way dependent upon my uncle, it would have never occurred to him to question his authority. Not only my parents but even I as a child knew that not only the opinion of my eldest uncle mattered, but the opinion of every single member of the family had to be considered in everything.

The children of today have no such feeling and acknowledge no authority beyond their parents, if that. But when I was a child, the idea of the joint family still persisted, and though each unit lived separately and was financially independent

of the others, together they formed a single larger unit, the acknowledged head of which in our family was my father's eldest cousin, Sir Zahid Suhrawardy, whom we called Chachajan. He was the sweetest and gentlest of persons, but despite his gentleness he had such a quiet dignity that I do not think that anyone ever had the courage to be impertinent to him. His presence was like the shade of an old and venerable tree which sheltered us all. We knew and admitted the fact that his opinion was final in any matter of family dispute, and, therefore, when my mother was worried that I had reached the age of nine without being put in purdah, she appealed to Chachajan to speak to my father, which he did. I do not know what he said to my father, but after his departure my father sent for me and told me that now I was grown up it was time I started observing purdah.

This formal stepping into purdah made very little difference in my life. I did not go out of the house anyway, so all that it meant was that I did not now appear before the menservants and did not go to that part of the house where my father received his friends and that I now watched functions held there through *chiks*; these are pieces of bamboo curtain which are put up for ladies to see through without being seen. Ladies also watch through Venetian blinds. There is an art in opening it at the right angle so that one can see but not be seen. I never got the knack. According to my mother it was because I had been put in purdah too late. She said I never really learnt the art of living in purdah properly, and it is a fact that it is an art and it consists of many things besides knowing how to look without being seen yourself.

CHAPTER V

Political Background

THE STORM that was to sweep away the pattern of life that I knew as a child was already brewing. Its rumblings could be heard and even my child's mind could sense the tension though it could not comprehend the reason for it.

The First World War had just finished and there was general unrest in India caused by frustration and disappointment because the promises made and hopes held out during the war had not been fulfilled. Two things contributed to intensifying this after-war malaise. The advent of Gandhi with his dynamic philosophy of non-violence and non-co-operation was one, and the burning indignation that the Muslims in India felt at what was happening in Turkey was another. It was impossible for anyone who is not personally aware of the peculiar attachment the Muslims of India had for the Muslims in other parts of the world to understand this. The revival of the pan-Islamic movement in the early part of the century had given this an added fillip and so, after the war, the attempted dismemberment of Turkey by Greece with the connivance and half-hearted support of the British was sufficient to inflame Muslim feeling in India. This sympathy for Turkey was no mere pale sentiment, but took a real and tangible form. The students showed their sympathy by boycotting universities, men by giving up Government jobs, women by eschewing foreign cloth, and children by reciting passionate songs in praise of Turkish valour.

I myself still remember learning such poems and the emotional hysteria which swept over us in this connection. Gandhi was quick to take advantage of this. By sympathizing

with the Muslims over the question of Caliphate, as this movement was called, he won their whole-hearted support. It was the first time in the history of the Indian struggle for independence that Hindu and Muslim unity was achieved. It was the time when the Hindus shouted 'Allah-o-Akbar' and the Muslims shouted 'Gandhi-ji-ki-Jai'. These were the days of high resolve and great emotional fervour but not of clear thinking or the formulation of definite objectives. The British, usually wise in such matters, made a terrific blunder at this time—the notorious massacre at Jalianwala Bagh in Amritsar. General O'Dwyer, the British Commandant, in order to disperse a mob, ordered the shooting of twenty thousand unarmed people who had assembled in defiance of an order which prohibited political gatherings, and, as the meeting was in a walled garden, when the shooting began, the people were completely trapped. How many were actually killed will never be really known; the official figures put the number down as very small, but the Indians believe them to be very high indeed. [Whatever the actual number, there is no doubt that the massacre in Jalianwala Bagh sounded the death-knell of the British Empire in India.] The wave of indignation that swept the country was tremendous and, for the first time, the British began to be hated in a way they had never been hated before.

Jalianwala Bagh occurred in 1919. In 1922, I could still feel the reverberations of it and it remained a trigger word for the Indians ever after; the name of General O'Dwyer, coupled with that of Captain Hudson, who during the Mutiny of 1857 had the infamous task of executing the sons of the Mogul Emperor in cold blood and without trial, have become the two most hated British names for the people of the Indian sub-continent. Because of this wave of hatred the visit of the Prince of Wales, which should have been an occasion for rejoicing, was greeted with a sullen resentment by the Indians and with grave apprehension by the British. I remember seeing the procession on his arrival and, full of colour and

pageantry though it was, even my child's mind could sense the tension in the air.

There was a feeling of apprehension and not all the trappings and gaiety could hide the underlying feeling of gloom. I can still clearly remember the awful feeling of unspoken fear and not understanding why it should be so, and why something that outwardly was so gay should make people look and feel so mournful.

As always when political agitation reaches a certain point, efforts were made by the British to ease the situation by granting some measures of self-government. This was done now and what are known as the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms were introduced. While considering them inadequate, a large section of the Indian people availed themselves of the opportunity and contested the elections. In Bengal it was mainly due to the far-reaching policy of my uncle, Sir Abdullah Suhrawardy, that the Muslims used this chance, thereby laying the foundation of future independence. My uncle was a remarkable man. His brilliance amounted to genius. At nineteen he had written a book for which he received an appreciation from Tolstoy. As a student in England he became a leader of the Pan-Islamic movement. The first public prayers to be held by Muslims in Britain were led by him. He sacrificed a lucrative career at the Bar and the certainty of a High Court judgeship to the task of creating political consciousness among the Muslims of Bengal; and the debt they owe him cannot be over-estimated. Their objective so far, had been the securing of a place in the Government services. The young men who came to my uncle for a recommendation for this purpose could not understand his remark 'I want you to become one who gives jobs to others'; for it had not occurred to them that they could have a say in the very act of governing the country. So my uncle trained and drilled hundreds of students in the way of politics. His large house in Mirzapur Street looked like a seminar for young men. Many

of those responsible in guiding the destinies of their people today are men whom my uncle persuaded to give up the secure path of Government Service for the hazards of a political career. He also prevailed upon as many members of our family as he could, to abandon their well-paid jobs and enter politics. Our house therefore became the centre of intense political activity.

I could no more understand the reason for the excitement and exaltation of these elections than I did the cause of the tension earlier on, but just as I had sensed the tension, I shared the feeling of excitement. I liked talking to people who were working for the elections. They seemed to express very gratifying sentiments about my father and other members of the family, and I entirely agreed and thought that anyone opposing them was acting in the height of bad taste. The political significance of it all dawned on me much later. I do not think that the people who voted for my father and my uncles, and got others to vote for them, understood about the political situation either. Their support was based on personal loyalty and personal likes and dislikes. Parties and party alignment had not become clear and were not to become so for a few years yet. I do not remember hearing anything about Congress or the League, but very often I heard people speak about Gandhi, Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali. They probably knew nothing about the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms and what these had given them, but they did sense that something was happening; something that meant change for them and that what they were doing was in some way connected with the attainment of *Swaraj* and that it was right that *Swaraj* should be attained.

‘Of course it should,’ I agreed without understanding a thing, and held forth on the subject at length. They listened to me with an amused tolerance. I think I flattered their vanity by being such an avid listener, so they put up with me. My mother, however, strongly disapproved of my being in the

company of strange men and often, just as I was in the midst of a very heated discussion, I would be sent for and scolded.

I remember the day my father was elected, the wild excitement, the procession and the congratulations. Later on this feeling of partisanship shifted from a person to a party, from an individual to a cause.

There was an easing of tension for a few years after the election during which my father resigned from the Legislature and we were away in places in the north of India and far from Calcutta, which was at that time the nerve-centre of political agitation. Our return coincided with a fresh wave of unrest sweeping the country. My father was appointed Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, which is the oldest in the Indian sub-continent and justifiably proud of its traditions. Its students were also the most politically conscious, for Bengal has always been in the forefront of the struggle for independence, and my father was therefore stepping right into the arena of political unrest.

Unrest had begun to grow since the Simon Commission had come to India in 1927 to examine the progress made in self-government since 1919. The fact that no Indian was included in it caused it to be boycotted, and the subsequent formation of the Indian Statutory Commission to advise it had not succeeded in placating public opinion. Nor did the succeeding Round Table Conference meet with much approval from extremist opinion in India. The feeling of frustration was being given vent to in a wave of terrorism, particularly in Bengal; three successive magistrates were shot in Midnapur and in many other districts there had been successful or unsuccessful attempts on the lives of British officials. Hunger strikes were being carried on in gaol by Indian prisoners, and the death in prison of Jatin-Das and the execution of Bhagat Singh caused further tension. Students, the most emotional and vulnerable section of the people, reacted to all this and I remember delegations and counter-delegations of them com-

ing to see my father continuously. It was in connection with one of the student riots that Miss Mary Slade, the famous disciple of Gandhi, came to see him. I remember her talking to my father and mother and being struck by her obvious sincerity, but I could not help feeling there was something rather incongruous about an Englishwoman adopting the way of life that she had.

Terrorism was at its height when the time for the annual Convocation came round. The Governor of Bengal was always the *ex officio* Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, and at this time the Governor was Sir Stanley Jackson, a kind and liberal-minded man who must have disliked the atmosphere in which he found himself. My father was advised not to hold the Convocation or to hold it without the Governor presiding, but he considered this would be bad for discipline and would make the controlling of the students still more difficult and decided to hold the Convocation as usual. It took place on the 6th February, 1932, and during the giving of degrees Bina Das, a girl student, twenty-three years of age, attempted to shoot the Governor. Luckily the first shot missed its target and my father was able to get to her and stop her. This caused a great stir and much comment in the Press. As Hindu-Muslim differences were already growing, the fact that my father was a Muslim and the girl a Hindu was played up by the Press a great deal. On the other hand, as my father was knighted by a special communiqué 'for conspicuous gallantry in the face of personal danger' it brought him back to the forefront of political life and got him involved in many controversial matters of the time.

During these years, there were many currents and cross-currents in Indian political life. The Hindu and Muslim objectives had not yet become separate and clear-cut but the gulf was getting wider and wider. Individual action by narrow-minded and bigoted people was adding fuel to the fire. One of these was the writing of obscene and malicious things about

Islam and the Prophet of Islam by certain Hindus. There was quite an epidemic of such obnoxious writing and indignation amongst Muslims was mounting high.

Since terrorism and killing were in the air it was not surprising when two young Muslim boys, Amir Ali and Abdullah, aged sixteen and nineteen years, killed the Hindu author of a particularly revolting book called *Rangila-Rasul*. These boys were caught almost red-handed and condemned to death and a wave of sympathy for the young culprits swept over the Muslims. It was argued that all the terrorists who had attempted to murder British officials had got off with a sentence of imprisonment due to their extreme youth, and therefore these young boys should also be let off. My cousin, Shaheed Suhrawardy, who had gained a great reputation in 1926 by securing a reprieve for men condemned during the Calcutta riots, was one of the lawyers in charge of the case, and when the Governor's life was saved, as it was thought, mainly because of my father's presence of mind he began receiving deputation after deputation from Muslims to use his influence with the British Governor in trying to secure clemency for Amir Ali and Abdullah.

One afternoon a procession of at least ten thousand came marching up to our house. This was my first experience of a crowd charged with emotion and almost drunk with fanatical faith, though later I was to see many such. The impact that mass emotion like this has on one is something one cannot convey to another unless that person has himself, or herself, witnessed it. Shakespeare alone has succeeded in describing it in *Julius Caesar*. What happens is that for the duration, while the mass emotion holds sway, one ceases to be an individual with any individual judgment of feeling and becomes part of the mass, sharing the one predominant emotion which is for the moment swaying it. Though I watched that surging mass of humanity from a balcony in the second story of our house, I felt enveloped in it. The cries of 'Allah-o-Akbar', 'Islam

Zindabad', 'Namus-i-paimbar Zindabad', 'Dushman-i-Islam Murdabad', rent the air, and as each slogan was raised and echoed by the thousands I felt a tingle of emotion pass through my whole body.

The mother of these two unfortunate boys also came and saw my mother and asked her to speak to my father to try and get the death sentence repealed. She was a simple village woman from the Punjab who understood very little of what political repercussions her sons' action was causing and only felt the pain all mothers feel. I thus quite early in life saw both the tragic and spectacular side of political strife.

I have mentioned this incident in some detail because it did have a most profound effect on my young mind and imagination. It can almost be said that my political career dates from this time, for I made my first speech proposing a motion of censure on the execution of these two young men whom I regarded as martyrs. It was a highly emotional speech ending with a stirring verse of the Koran which asks for God's help for the Muslims and prays to him to smite all enemies of the true religion. Everyone was deeply stirred and a resolution was passed with all the ladies standing and a prayer was said for the souls of the two boys. Making this speech was a great act of daring on my part. It was tantamount to a criticism and condemnation of the Government and this ladies' meeting was sponsored by a group of women who had nothing farther from their minds than criticism of the Government, but this aspect of the matter had not struck my young egotistical mind at that stage.

What had needed the screwing up of every ounce of courage I could muster was the fact that I was making a speech in public, a bold and unheard-of thing for a young girl to do and I had done this without seeking my mother's permission but merely by giving my name to the secretary. As I have said earlier, girls were not taken to any house other than to those of relations and very close friends. My mother had taken me to this

meeting as a special concession and only because it was being held in the house of a very special friend and the ladies present at the meeting were almost all personal friends, but even in such a small and exclusive circle for a young girl to get up and make a speech was unheard of. I knew full well that it would shock and displease my mother very much and that I dared to do so was a proof of the extent I had begun to be swayed by political emotion.

At the conclusion of the meeting many people went up and congratulated my mother on my speech. She accepted the congratulations with a suitable show of pleasure but during the rest of the time we were there I dared not meet her eyes.

When we got into our car to go home, she told me just this: 'It is the last time I ever take you out'; and she kept her word. This was early in 1931. I was married early in 1933, so my sentence of punishment did not last for a very long period.

CHAPTER VI

My Marriage

ONE OF the things all my Western friends ask is, 'Did you not object to your marriage being arranged?' And they are surprised when I say, 'No, I did not.' Yet it should not be a matter of surprise because it is not so very long ago that marriages were arranged in every country in Europe and even today, in Spain, France and Italy, arranged marriages are still quite common. So are they in Latin American countries, and in North America, in pioneering days, marriages were arranged with a view to convenience, and 'King's girls', who came from France to be brides of Canadian pioneers, had little, if any, say in the choice of their husbands. What is new is the idea of the love-match rather than the arranged marriage. Amongst the older nations marriages were looked upon as social institutions and as such were not to be entrusted to the fleeting fancy of youth but to the mature judgment of elders. If you are brought up in a milieu which regards love-matches as something that is just not done, you accept this as the only and correct point of view.

At this juncture my Western friends say, 'Yes, we understand that it would be so with girls who were brought up entirely with that point of view, but you, who went to an English school and knew that girls of your age had more freedom in this matter, did you not resent it?' Here again the answer is no. I cannot explain why, but the fact is that it never occurred to me that I should have a say in my marriage, and this was not because I was not affected by my English education. I was—particularly just at this period of my life—very much affected by it and by all the movement and talk

of women's emancipation and women's rights which was then common. I used to cause my mother many an awkward moment by blurting out a remark which, according to orthodox opinion, was an extremely bold one and which was always imputed to my unfortunate English education. I was always getting into trouble for expression of views which were shocking, not only because of their unorthodoxy but doubly so because they were voiced by a young unmarried girl who was not supposed to think of these matters, much less express a viewpoint on them. And yet where the question of marriage was concerned, I held absolutely orthodox views; in this matter tradition had won over experiment, and so it has continued throughout my life and has puzzled others and has made life difficult if perhaps more interesting for me.

I would like to give some idea here of how a girl was schooled in tradition. It was not that I was ever made to sit down and listen to long lectures on the subject, but from my mother, from my aunts, from older cousins, from the maid-servants, from the general atmosphere in the family and the house, one somehow gleaned what was expected of one, what was right and what was done and what was not done.

We—that is girls of my generation—accepted the fact that marriages would be arranged for us, that we would have no say in them, and that getting married was inevitable. There was, of course, no question of a career and also no question of not getting married. One was born, one eventually got married also. Mrs. Naidu, that wonderful and witty woman, had once replied to a query 'What is your unmarried women's problem?' in these words: 'We do not have any. Our women are born married!'

That marriage was our destination and that we were being trained for it was brought home to us in many ways. Every time we did something we should not have done we were reprimanded by these words, 'What will "They" think of you? Is that how you are going to behave there?' We knew that

'they' meant the in-laws and 'there' meant the *susral*, that, in our language, is the word for your husband's family. (I have not been able to find an English word which corresponds to it or which indicates even any conception of a *susral* existing in the English mind.)

Girls in my days were brought up with the one and only view of doing credit to their mother in *susral*. Here again I want to say that the hold this sort of conditioned reflex takes on one's mind is very strong. I have never been able to rid myself of the feeling of awe for in-laws even though, because of the rapid social changes that have taken place in the last twenty years, they now have very little, if any, say in the lives of their daughters-in-law.

So it was that, trained to accept marriage as the eventual goal of one's existence and the arranging of it as the absolute right of one's parents, when the time came for me to get married, I had no feeling of resentment about it. As I have said, the question of my marriage had begun to be discussed from the time I was eleven years old. The first definite proposal had come when I was thirteen and the same family had persisted for several years. But my father considered me too young and had always refused—and had it not been for the fact that my mother's health had begun to fail very rapidly his answer to their latest proposal would have been the same. But fate had decreed that I was to marry this particular person and therefore my father sent for Chachajan, as he was the head of the family and no marriage could be arranged without his formal consent. Once he had agreed my father decided to accept. Amongst us, once a proposal is accepted one does not go back on it without very grave reason. All the preliminary inquiries are done before the acceptance and my father had gone into it two years before when a tentative proposal had been made. This also is customary. Definite proposals are not sent till enough time has elapsed after the tentative proposal for inquiries to be made on either side and there is a

reasonable chance of acceptance. This was some time at the end of July, 1932. My husband, however, came down in September and was seen by all the male members of the family and, before he left, my father tied *imam zamin* on his arm; this is a golden embroidered armlet which is ordinarily tied on when one is going on a journey but also signifies formal engagement. Feverish preparations for the marriage then began.

As I have said, our marriages are like a pageant and, since I was the only child among four brothers, arrangements for mine were even more elaborate than usual. Not only my parents' wishes but those of my aunts and uncles counted on every score: how many dresses I was going to have, what sort of jewellery, where would the garden party take place, how many days the wedding ceremonies should last, where would the wedding banquet be held, and so forth. The house was full of women all the time discussing and making clothes. I was being sent for constantly to be measured and fitted, though I was not allowed to say whether I liked or disliked any of the things that were being made for me. This I think was really extremely silly and carried things too far for it resulted in my giving away masses of clothes because I did not like them and I am glad that now, arranged marriages or not, girls have a say in the choosing of their trousseau. Luckily for me I had a room on the third floor of the house where I could study undisturbed but even so it was very difficult to concentrate with such a hullabaloo going on.

Each stage of the preparation was marked by a ceremony. The day the scissors were put to the cloth all the ladies of the family gathered. There was singing and music till late in the evening. Then the day the *dupattas* and *saris* were to be dyed there was again a great gathering of ladies to the accompaniment of music and singing. When the dresses were all stitched and ready to be packed, all the young girls of the family came over. It is really incredible the amount of work

that is put into the preparation of a bridal trousseau amongst us. Each set of dresses, complete with lingerie, is wrapped separately with fine gold threads and then six or eight sets are put in a square cloth of silk which is folded over. This silk square is in itself a work of art, being elaborately embroidered and edged with gold lace. In fact, every article made for the bride's use is a masterpiece of handwork. Marriages in our society were so elaborate because they provided our women with amusement and work, for in those days they otherwise had very little of either.

Besides the ladies who came almost daily to help in the preparation of the trousseau, my cousins would descend on me in a bunch practically every other day for the sole purpose of teasing me and talking about my would-be husband. This was also customary and was the only way in which a girl could learn about her future in-laws and obtain other pieces of information regarding her marriage. It helped to make one familiar with some of the aspects of one's future life and it built up a sort of pseudo-romantic atmosphere about the whole thing. This, too, was a conventional behaviour pattern and I and my cousins conformed to it. I always maintained an air of complete indifference to any information that they might have collected, while they gave every bit of important or unimportant news with an air of doing me the greatest of favours. The day they got hold of my husband's picture they came looking extremely smug and self-satisfied and began dropping hints, saying to each other, 'Do you think she will be interested in what we have got or will she not?' 'Just look at her . . . she is all ears!'

'I certainly am not.' I replied with a great show of unconcern and fixed my eyes securely on *The Tempest*.

'All right, if you are not interested we won't show it to you. Isn't it a pity? We went to so much trouble in getting it from Khala Amma's box.'

'Yes, we had better go and put it back before she misses

it,' said Raisi Apa, the eldest, who was trying to put on a responsible and reliable air. After this announcement, she pulled out a photograph, waved it under my nose and pretended to go downstairs to put it away. Halfway down, they all stopped and Rehmat Khala said, 'Oh, no, really we can't do this to her. It will break her little heart and she won't be able to study one bit. I think we will be kind to her though she doesn't deserve it.' Saying this, she flicked the photograph from where they were standing so that it fell in front of me, hitting me on the way, at which there were further giggles. The photograph (I still have it) was one of my husband with his two younger brothers. It was most tantalizing to have it under my nose and not know which of the three young men was supposed to be destined for me. Anyway, I was not going to give in. So, after a while, they all came and bent over my shoulders and began teasing me again. 'Now, which of the three do you like? Which do you think it is or aren't you interested? What do we get if we tell you?'—and so forth.

'Oh, I am not interested at all,' I said, 'and get off my shoulders, you people, and let me get on with my work.' I pretended to be very cross.

Not a bit abashed, they continued their banter, and in the end I was told which was the one that was going to be my husband.

In this same way I learned that I was going to get married in April after completing my examination and not in December before I had taken it, as at one time seemed probable. This bit of information was not given to me in a straightforward manner but after a great deal of mild torturing. I remember the incident very well. Rehmat Khala came bouncing up the stairs, snatched the book I was trying to read and flung it to the other end of the room, announcing,

'Hi, why do you bother with this any more?'

'Yes, why do you?' came a chorus from the others, bounding in after her.

‘Well, I have got an exam to do in five months. You may have heard of it,’ I replied with what I considered heavy sarcasm.

‘Hum, that’s what you think. You have got to do another exam, my girl,’ they replied in unison.

I ignored the remark.

‘Honestly,’ one of them said, ‘it is a pure waste of time because you are never going to be allowed to take the exam. Your in-laws are insisting that the marriage take place in December.’

‘What!’ I exclaimed, jolted out of my feigned indifference.

‘Yes, they are insisting,’ they replied.

‘Oh, no! Oh goodness me!’ I said, almost on the point of tears.

‘Ah well,’ they replied, ‘it seems that the dearest wish of your heart is known to your lord and master. He has very kindly and graciously agreed that you should be allowed to take the exam and he will compose his soul in patience till April.’

‘You horrible creatures,’ I said, ‘what a scare you gave me.’

‘Hum, that’s all she has to say to us! Aren’t you pleased that your would-be husband is showing so much consideration already?’

‘Of course, she means to have him toe the line and she is beginning now,’ one of them replied—I do not remember which.

And so the teasing and bantering went on right till the day of the marriage.

My examinations were completed on the 10th of April and the wedding ceremonies started from the 14th. That morning the bridal party arrived from Nagpur and that afternoon the *Mayun* ceremony took place. This occurs three days before the wedding and for it perfumed oils, perfumes and all toilet accessories and a set of clothes in yellow comes as a present from the husband’s people. As soon as these things had arrived

and had been arranged in the drawing-room, I was taken out of my room and made to sit in the centre of the drawing-room on a *masnad*.

Seven ladies of the family put the perfumed oil and the *ubatna* on my forehead with their fingers. The ladies chosen for this ceremony are those considered to be especially happy and fortunate in their marriage and children. After they had put the token *ubatna* on my forehead I was again taken back to my room where, amidst much joking and laughing, I was rubbed thoroughly with *ubatna*. This is a perfumed paste made by pounding all sorts of herbs together. Rubbing it on the skin is supposed to be very good for the complexion. Those three days before the wedding, I was rubbed with it twice a day at least and I must say my skin never felt so satiny smooth as it did then. After *ubatna* has been rubbed on, it is taken off with perfumed oil. It is altogether a very messy affair, and therefore, for those three days one is dressed in the simplest yellow-coloured muslin so as not to show the stain, for *ubatna* stains yellow.

From the day of the *Mayun* practically the whole family had moved into our house, to say nothing of dozens and dozens of servants. The pandemonium was something indescribable, but all that is so much a part of our weddings and ceremonies that, if it had not taken place, I suppose one would have thought that there was something wrong. After the *Mayun* ceremony, the bride-to-be never leaves her room and one or the other of her friends always stays with her to keep her company.

The last two days passed in the last-minute hustle of getting everything ready. Eventually the day of the wedding arrived. At about ten in the morning I was taken into the bathroom and made to sit on a low silver stool while I had a final rub-down with *ubatna* and my hair was washed with perfumed herbs, after which the maids and my cousins left and I had a bath. My hair was tied and left loosely plaited to be done in a

more elaborate style later in the evening. After that I had a light lunch and *mehndi* was put on my hands and feet.

Mehndi is a henna paste which we use to colour our nails, but on the wedding day the entire palm of the hands and the feet are coloured with it. After they had finished that I was told to try and go to sleep, which I obediently tried to do, but it was impossible because of all the noise and rush that was going on. I do not know why it is that in my country we cannot do anything without shouting a great deal and making a terrific amount of noise. I have lived abroad and have had occasion to arrange fairly large receptions, but there is never quite that commotion in connection with them as there is at home. I believe the only people who get as excited and noisy as we are the Italians.

Our house, like all houses in Calcutta, did not have much of a garden but just a narrow strip at the back. And it was from there that all the shouting and the noise came.

‘Here, you fool, how do you think I am going to get this ready by eight o’clock if you keep working at that pace? I have been cooking for every wedding in this family for generations. Do you want to disgrace me? For goodness sake get me some more large *daigchees*, otherwise I will not be responsible for anything.’ . . . And so it went on. It was a way of showing self-importance and personal interest. There was a great deal to be done between then and the evening; there were no less than fourteen hundred people coming to dinner.

Barat, that is the bridegroom’s arrival, was scheduled for seven o’clock in the evening. *Sachak*, that means the bride’s dresses and jewellery and other presents, are sent beforehand. There was plenty of time yet, but my cousins, out of sheer nervousness, began grumbling.

‘Goodness me, it is nearly five o’clock! How are we going to get her dressed in time? *Sachak* has not arrived yet!’

‘Oh yes and Uncle [that was my father] said that the ceremony should finish by ten o’clock at the latest!’

Just then my aunt came in and heard this remark.

‘What! Whoever heard of weddings finishing at ten o’clock!’ The tone in which she said it implied that to do so would not be quite decent.

‘Oh, Uncle said it,’ replied one of my cousins.

‘Hum,’ said my aunt, ‘he would. One of these newfangled ideas of his. It is time he learnt to get over them. Other people are concerned in this matter and not only he. What do you think the bridegroom’s people will say if we hustle them off at ten? The ceremonies will go on as they always go on right till the early hours of the morning and that’s that.’

Well, between my father’s attempt at modernization and the rest of the family’s determination to forestall him in his efforts, a compromise was reached. The ceremonies did not go on quite till the early hours of the morning, nor did they finish at ten o’clock. They finished, I believe, somewhere near half past one.

The *sachak* arrived in due course. It consisted of seven beautiful *saris*, complete with all accessories, a complete set of jewellery, further toilet accessories, *sehra* and mounds and mounds of *luddoos*, a particular kind of sweetmeat shaped like a ball especially made for weddings. Three of my cousins were in charge of dressing me, while other younger girls hovered around.

The bride’s hair, as I have said, is done in a most elaborate style. It is parted in the middle and about a dozen very fine plaits are made, twined with gold thread, and all these dozen plaits are again plaited together with a great deal of gold lace and tassels. The hair in front is also done in elaborate curls and sprinkled with gold dust and gold stars. When my cousins were about halfway through doing my hair, the band struck up, heralding the approach of the *barat*, or wedding procession. Everyone rushed out to see it and I was left all alone in the room. At that moment I was seized with a terrible feeling of panic.

All the months that the wedding preparations had been going on I had been preoccupied with my exam and had not really had time to think much about the impending change in my life. It was only in the last week that I had had time and the more I thought of it, the more apprehensive I became and the lonelier I felt. In all my nearly eighteen years I had never left my mother except for that one trip to Delhi and a short stay in a school in Aligarh. I had never really been away from home and now I was to go to a completely strange household where I did not know a soul and begin making a new life for myself. Most of my cousins had married into families in Calcutta, or at least in Bengal, and had known some member of the family before, but I was going to complete strangers. This feeling had been growing on me for the last week and the band heralding the wedding procession sounded to me like the trumpet of doom. I had a terrible feeling of being left alone and abandoned during these moments when everybody had gone away and left me.

Soon, however, I heard my mother's and aunts' voices scolding my cousins and directing them back to their duty, namely that of dressing me in time. They came tripping in, chattering all the time, saying how wonderful the procession had looked, how the electric arches had gleamed, how they had or had not got a glimpse of the bridegroom, how so and so had posed and how impossible somebody else was always getting in first! All this petty talk grated on my ears. I was feeling dreadful, but my cousins, oblivious of my feelings, took up their half-finished task.

They had not made much progress when it was announced that the men were coming in to receive the bride's consent. Our marriages are done by proxy, that is to say the girl appoints someone as her representative in the presence of two male witnesses and this representative then acts as her proxy at the actual signing of the wedding contract. The person chosen is always a near relation of the bride; in my case it

was Chachajan. The witnesses were my cousin, Shaheed, and my mother's cousin, Nawabzada Latifur Rehman. As their coming was announced, a veil was hastily thrown over my shoulders and a purdah held up from behind which these gentlemen were going to ask me for my consent to the marriage; though they were close relatives, this also is customary.

This is one of the most poignant moments in our weddings. My mother came over and sat holding me throughout the ordeal. Every bride always cried at this moment but I could not stop crying for a long while afterwards. My cousins looked aghast at my tear-stained face, not knowing what to do to hide the ravages. They bathed my face with cold water and put foundation cream on, only for it to be washed away by another avalanche of tears. At last they began to get desperate and ran to the older ladies for assistance. My aunt, whose word had great weight with all of us, immediately ticked me off in a few crisp sentences.

'My dear girl, you are not the first girl in the world to be getting married and leaving your parents. Every girl, once she has grown up, has to go through this ordeal. It is a woman's lot and there is no use making a scene and a fuss.'

I realized that what she said was true and, as I have said, she had a great influence on me; but the tears would not stop.

The ladies from my husband's family had arrived and had been greeted with the traditional ceremonies and now the banquet began. Electricity nearly always fails in the midst of our weddings but at my wedding the water supply also gave out and to this day my sister-in-law teases me by saying that she had to wash her hands by opening soda and lemonade bottles.

At last the dinner was over. Throughout its progress and after it, a sort of relay service was carried on by my men cousins outside and my girl cousins behind the purdah. This is how every bit of news of what was happening outside was

passed on. . . . So and so was sitting in such and such a place. So and so had come. So and so had not come. The bridegroom's brother had made this remark. His father was heard to say such and such a thing. . . . Backwards and forwards they came, bringing bits of news and at the same time telling the girls to hurry as it was getting very late for the *Ru-nu-mai*, that is the ceremony when the bride and bridegroom see each other for the first time.

Just before I was taken out to the drawing-room for the *Ru-nu-mai*, *sehra* was tied on my forehead. This is very pretty to look at but very heavy to wear. I was again carried into the middle of the room and made to sit on a *masnad*. My cousins sat round me, adjusting my dress and *sehra*. After a few moments had passed my husband came and sat opposite me on the *masnad*. A gold and red gauze veil was thrown over us in the customary fashion and a copy of the Koran Shareef and a mirror put between us. The bridegroom reads a few verses from the Koran and then sees his bride's face in the mirror, after which he asks her to open her eyes. (By the way, I forgot to mention that ever since the girl's *Mayun* ceremony, the girl keeps her eyes shut or at least completely downcast for several days or, in olden times, a few weeks after the wedding.) After a great deal of coaxing, in which all her friends join in, the bride is supposed to flutter her eyelids for half a second and after this the *Ru-nu-mai* ceremony is over.

Now everybody gave the bridegroom *salami*, that is a gold sovereign in a silk handkerchief as a present. This is, or I should say was, our way of giving a wedding present. Now most people give wedding presents in the European style. At my wedding there were both. I received from my father's English and Hindu friends hundreds of wedding presents and *salami* from my own relations and the more orthodox Muslim friends of the family. After this was over *sonpna* takes place, that is the bride's and the bridegroom's fathers come in. The bridegroom's father takes the hand of his son, and the bride's father

takes the hand of his daughter and places it in the hand of the groom. This is another poignant moment in the wedding and is equivalent to giving away the bride in the English wedding ceremony.

While all these ceremonies were taking place, the wives of my father's English friends had been waiting impatiently to catch a glimpse of me. It was not the custom amongst us for anyone to see the bride before the *Ru-nu-mai* ceremony so they had to wait until it was over. Then I was taken out on to a verandah and made to sit on a sofa while they came in and shook hands with me and wished me happiness. I knew some of them very well and there were amongst them all my college friends and teachers, but I was not supposed to speak to anyone and had to keep my eyes closed lest my orthodox relatives, who were terribly shocked anyway that the *ferangi* women should be allowed to see me at all, would have been further horrified. Just when these ladies began to come to see me, the fireworks began. I believe they were very good but I could not see any of it though I felt sorely tempted to turn my head just a bit and have a look; but, amongst us, at your own wedding you are a sort of puppet who performs for the amusement of others.

At long last it was over. Ordinarily I should now have left for my husband's home, had it been in Calcutta, but as my husband's family were staying in a rented flat, it was considered best that I stay on at my father's house. The room that had been arranged for me had been beautifully done up with flowers all over and a sort of canopy of flowers on my bed.

The day after the wedding there were more ceremonies and further exchanges of presents and the day after that I left for Nagpur, where further elaborate and colourful ceremonies took place, for our weddings are long drawn out affairs lasting days.

CHAPTER VII

Adjustment

THE GREATEST change that marriage brings into the life of a girl in our society is that she has to adjust herself to the way of life of a completely new family. In some ways, her position is similar to that of an English girl going for the first time to a boarding school; only her ordeal is greater.

As I have said before, in my country a girl is trained from her childhood towards this end. She is prepared for it as for an examination. Her manners, her behaviour, her conduct in every respect are made to conform to the pattern which will be expected of her by her in-laws. Any sign of self-assertiveness is curbed with the remark: 'You will not be able to get your own way in *susrat*.'

And it is true that one could not be very self-assertive and, therefore, it was wise to train girls to the sort of life that lay before them. It was a life which required above all things tact and ability to give and take, a power to endure and to be able to put the interest of others before oneself. It puts a premium on virtues such as obedience and self-sacrifice. Mothers laid the foundation of these qualities in a girl's character and mothers-in-law built on them, so that they could grow into wives and mothers possessed of these virtues which had been the hallmark of well-bred women in our society.

At first I found adjustment comparatively easy. My in-laws had expected me to be much worse, that is to say much more modern than I was. They knew that I had been to an English school and college and this had branded me as completely *outrée* in their eyes. They had asked for my hand in marriage because their English-educated son wanted an educated wife,

but they were prepared for this wife to be an absolute *kranti*, as the few girls who did go to English schools were usually completely Westernized.

What they did not know was that I had a one hundred per cent orthodox mother who was not relegated to the background as some Westernized men relegated their orthodox wives but who had as much say and influence on my education as my father, and whose personality was so strong as to dominate and subjugate the otherwise Westernized household. So, 'English-school educated' though I was, I had been drilled most rigidly to conform to the expected pattern of behaviour of a young bride at her in-laws. I kept my head down, my eyes shut and the veil well over my face. I did not move at all of my own accord but was taken from one place to another and on such occasions behaved more or less like a limp rag doll. I ate very little and that after a great deal of persuasion. This by the way, was not out of modesty but, being an active person and used to moving about a great deal in my home, I had lost my appetite completely now that I was confined to sitting in one place for hours. Though this was not intentional, it helped me to get another good mark, for it seemed that nicely brought up girls were never ravenously hungry.

In fact, I got good marks all round for I dressed in the orthodox bridal style, or rather I did not protest when I was so dressed up. I had *mehndi* on my hands, *kajal* on my eyes, *ifshans* (gold dust) and *chamki* (sequins) on my hair, the traditional cosmetic for brides, and *ittar* on my clothes, which, by the way, were always of very bright hues and richly embroidered, and I remained loaded with jewellery. I was absolutely the traditional bride.

It delighted my mother-in-law and all her family that they had found an 'English-educated' girl who was at the same time absolutely old-fashioned. That I was not so, at least not entirely, that my character would eventually reveal some

unmistakable sign of Western influence, they were to discover later. But, all went well for the present.

My conforming to the traditional behaviour was not play-acting. My mother had succeeded in persuading me that it was the only correct behaviour of well-brought-up girls and those who did not conform to it were ill bred. I had come to believe this and, therefore, conformed willingly. To this day I still believe in the traditional observances in a wedding, although perhaps not in all their rigidity; but I do believe that they should be observed for they are colourful and are characteristic of our way of life. Even if I had not believed in it, I would have conformed for I was not only fond of my mother but held her in great respect and, if I had not behaved according to tradition, it would have meant her losing face. This would have hurt her very much and I would not have dreamt of doing so. Anyway, had I attempted any deviation, I do not think I would have got away with it for amongst the maids who had come to look after me was Muna Buwa and I have described earlier what a stickler she was for discipline in tradition. She therefore accompanied every girl of the family on her first visit to her in-laws. My mother had borrowed her from aunt. She was taking no chances with me.

My in-laws lived in Nagpur where my father-in-law had retired and settled, but their family came from Bhopal, a Muslim Princely State which had originally belonged to the United Provinces, that centre and cradle of Muslim culture. So, though they now lived in a predominantly Hindu province, they and a few more families like them maintained an enclave of Muslim culture in the same way as my family did in Bengal. There was no difference of background to overcome except that in some ways life at my in-laws was even more orthodox than at home. My father-in-law was less Westernized than my father. He had not been to England and he had not spent years of his service living in anglicized areas of Indian towns.

The house in which we lived in Nagpur was originally a bungalow but it had been modified and built on till it had taken on the look of the traditional Muslim house with the large enclosed courtyard and a verandah running the entire length of the house. On the verandah there was the usual large *takhat* with the inevitable *pan-tan*. Alongside the wall, *charpoys* were stacked, which were taken out in the evening into the courtyard for sleeping. There were the *surhais* for drinking water and the samovar on one side for washing. All the living in the East is done on verandahs and, though we now build dining- and drawing-rooms in imitation of the West and have even taken to building suffocating little flats, we still go on living on verandahs and verandahs always have *takhats* which can be said to be the stage of all our activities. Though houses are now furnished with sofas and chairs and all modern European furniture, the *takhat* still holds its own as the most used piece of furniture in our households. It did not take me very long to feel quite at home on the large *takhat* on the verandah at Nagpur.

I have said that I found settling down in my new home easy because my in-laws were pleasantly surprised by my orthodoxy. It was also made easy by the fact that my mother-in-law was a most kindly person. She, like my mother, was in poor health and was soon to become a complete invalid, though she lived for some years after my marriage. Even the few weeks in which I saw her before she was struck down by illness, have left in my mind a great impression of her kind and mellow wisdom. She, like my mother, had a great influence over her whole household. Actually women in Muslim households invariably had great influence and a much greater say in household affairs than their menfolk. The fact that they observed purdah did not mean they were nonentities, though I know this is the general impression in the West and, like many other impressions, it is an erroneous one.

The relationship between father-in-law and daughter-in-law in our society is one of great formality. A daughter-in-law is never supposed to be seen by her father-in-law with her head uncovered or rushing round or speaking loudly, much less reclining or even sitting in a negligent manner. She is never supposed to speak to her husband before her father-in-law. During the seventeen years that my father-in-law lived after my marriage, I never once spoke to my husband in his presence, for it was not done. Despite this formality there generally is a great affection between father-in-law and daughter-in-law. As opposed to the mothers-in-law, whose attitude was traditionally critical, the fathers-in-law had an affectionate tenderness towards the young girls separated from their homes and brought under their roof. My father-in-law was wise and kind and loved his children deeply but unpossessively. He was happy if they did what he wanted them to do, but his love for them did not waver if they did not—a rare quality in a parent anywhere and still more rare in our country. His loving kindness to me throughout the years is amongst my most treasured memories.

But the person with whom I had most to do was my sister-in-law, my husband's widowed sister. Though she was only two years older than he, because she was a widow and because of my mother-in-law's frail health, she had been put more and more in charge of things and she had come to have a much greater importance in the house than her age warranted. In fact, after my mother-in-law's death, she has been virtually in the place of a mother to her brothers and a mother-in-law to all her brothers' wives.

Apa, as we all call her, is a typical product of purdah. She has all the good and bad points of the milieu she was brought up in and to this day rules over her household, consisting of a son and daughter-in-law, several grandchildren and twenty-two servants, not to say their families, in a truly matriarchal

fashion. She is kind but firm with them, the firmness being more apparent than the kindness, though if one looks closely one would see that there is a lot of genuine kindness in her also. Her servants are those who have been with the family for years and she knows all about them, the exact number and the age of the youngest grandchildren of the *mali* and the latest development in the quarrel between the cook and her daughter-in-law. But she stands no nonsense from them and does not hold with the modern nonsense about everybody being equal. Even the school-going children of the servants, who entertain such ideas, show her a feudal deference, for she will have no less. She is a remarkably intelligent person and her comments on current affairs are scathingly funny, though her outlook in many ways is narrow and she is not interested in anything that does not affect her small world.

Her rapier-sharp wit and sense of humour make her an excellent raconteuse and I fell under her spell from the beginning and, not having had a sister myself, lavished on her all my affections with the unsophisticated abandon of a schoolgirl. She, on the other hand, never forgot that I was a sister-in-law and there were set rules by which a sister-in-law's conduct should be judged and, measured by these standards, I fell very short in certain matters. A warm heart was, according to her way of thinking, no substitute for being ignorant about cooking and sewing and other household arts and crafts.

Besides this, when she came to know me better, she found in me what she regarded as some alarming tendencies towards modernity which, because of my conservative behaviour as a bride, she was not prepared for. My attitude regarding the furniture and furnishing of my first home shocked her very much, for I rejected, lock, stock, and barrel, all the things my husband had accumulated in the six years of his service, saying that they were 'awful' and so they were, for they were the typical furnishings of a district officer's bungalow, a hybrid mixture of the worst styles of the East and the West

and whatever I may or may not have known about running a household, I did know something about furniture. But to give one's opinion so freely and to be so critical was not expected of a new bride and it was also considered extremely extravagant to get everything new. All this bordered on self-assertion and that is a quality which is not encouraged in the young in our society, particularly not in daughters-in-law. I began to feel an undercurrent of criticism where so far there had been nothing but approval and there was more to come.

My sister-in-law was very orthodox but I was only partly so and the unorthodox side of me was to come in conflict over and over again with orthodoxy. Paradoxically, it was only because part of me was orthodox that the difficulty arose. Otherwise I could have ignored the tacit criticisms and implied disapproval and gone my own way as my other sisters-in-law did later on. But the traditional training that I had had ingrained into me could not ignore the disapproval of the *susral*, while the modern in me could not refrain many times from doing what was disapproved of.

While I was struggling to come to terms with this new world which from now on was to be my home, my world, my own familiar world of childhood came to an end with a suddenness that left me benumbed with shock. For my mother died at the time I needed her most. When her advice and guidance would have been of the utmost value to me, I found myself without it, alone amongst strangers. To heighten the tragedy of it, I had been away in Nagpur at the time of her death, for, true to her traditions, to the last she had refused to send for me, refused even to let me know that she was ill. And when, having heard of it by accident, I had rushed down to Calcutta, she had sent me back after a few days for, according to her, a married daughter's place was with her in-laws, particularly in the first few months after her marriage.

Such utter unselfishness and complete adherence to tradition would not have been possible to an ordinary woman even in the East, but my mother was not an ordinary woman. She was a rare person, even amongst her generation and now we will not see any women of her calibre and personality, for the very mould that fashioned her is broken.

CHAPTER VIII

Twilight of an Empire (1933-1936)

MY HUSBAND belonged to the Indian Civil Service, commonly known as the I.C.S. This had acquired a prestige and a glamour which is not generally associated with the civil service in any other country. Its tradition of exclusiveness had made it into a caste and exposed its members to both criticism and envy. They were accused of narrow-mindedness and rigidity of outlook, but it was reluctantly conceded that their reputation for integrity and efficiency was justified. It was, at first, manned entirely by the British but at this time more and more Indians were being admitted to its charmed circle. The Indians conformed rigidly to the pattern of behaviour that had evolved over the years. This service was the backbone of the Indian Empire, the steel frame that held it up, and it was the administrative ability of the members of this service that helped the two new countries to tide over their first unusually difficult years.

Soon after we were married my husband was posted as Under Secretary to the Industries Department of the Government of India, and so I came to live in New Delhi. That was in 1933 and New Delhi was then the seat of the Empire, the Imperial Secretariat and the Central Assembly. But so much has happened since, so completely has the picture changed, had already changed even by March, 1947, when I left, that it is difficult to believe that all this was so recent.

It was a wholly official city, and an English official city at that. For, though in less than fourteen years, power was to be transferred entirely to Indian hands, the number of Indian officials in New Delhi at this time was negligible, and in the

dress, manner and speech of these few men there was nothing Indian at all. They might, or rather they must, have come from Indian homes but, in their New Delhi drawing-rooms there was nothing to tell you so.

While the men were more or less of a type, the veneer of Westernization covering up differences of province, caste and class, in the case of the wives this was not so. Though they too tried to be as Westernized as their husbands and followed the code of official etiquette with meticulous care, they could not succeed in camouflaging the background from which they came. They all paid and returned calls with due formality, gave correct but dull little parties, knew the use of the right knives and forks and registered the same degree of disapproval as an English 'Memsahib' if an unfortunate bearer made the slightest mistake in serving meals or announcing callers. This spectacle of their laboured Westernization was rather pathetic and ridiculous, as was their effort to give themselves the airs of 'grandes dames'.

Simple Indian women, mostly from villages, who had not been able to shed their orthodoxy to the extent of being able to eat meat and food cooked by a non-Brahman, had yet learnt the official snobbery well enough not to notice anybody below a Joint Secretary's wife. As I was on the lowest rung of official life, being the wife of an Under Secretary, I never came to know these, for by the time I had reached a sufficiently high status to be taken notice of, I had found myself much more interesting things to do. But these were in a minority; in most their little affectations did not take away from their warm and kindly natures. They adopted the traditional Indian attitude of the older woman towards the young; that is an attitude of motherly affection. All these women were Hindus, for if the Indian officers in the Government were few, the Muslims were still fewer; in fact my husband was the only Muslim member of the I.C.S. in Delhi. But in 1933 this did not matter and the happy relationship established then has

continued in most cases despite the bitterness of partition.

The English women could be similarly divided into two types. There were those whose efforts to assume Mayfair airs did not hide the fact of their suburban origin and others who had that graciousness without patronage which characterizes the best type of English woman in the East. Amongst these I made many friends and without making it obvious they gave me much valuable advice which was of great help. Even spending a morning knitting in their beautiful gardens helped me to sort out many of my problems. Friendships thus formed have endured throughout the years: have survived my participation in the struggle directed against the British, and are now being carried on into the second generation.

Though individually satisfying relationships were possible, the social pattern was a very rigid and dull one. The 'season', as it was called, started around November and went on till the end of March. The months before and after this period were taken up by the exodus from and to Simla. Its highlights were the Viceregal Ball, the Viceregal Garden Party, the Horse Show and polo. Next in importance to these came the garden parties given by Executive Counsellors. Each gave one in the season and innumerable little dinner parties. Strict precedence was observed and everything went according to established rules. One could not ask or be asked to dinner by anyone above or below a certain rank. Needless to say, I found these restrictions both boring and irksome.

It was at the garden party of one of the Executive Counsellors that I made my début. I was till then officially still in purdah though since my marriage its rigidity had been much relaxed.

I did not enjoy my first experience of being out of purdah at all. I felt embarrassed at being looked at by hundreds of men decked up all in my best and my enjoyment of the party was further spoiled by my having to spend the entire evening trying to avoid being seen by my uncle, who very strongly disapproved of my coming out of purdah.

My subsequent sallies into mixed society I found no more interesting than the first one. I had imagined that mixed society would be composed of intelligent people, who would talk of more interesting things than were talked of in the women's world to which I had so far been confined, but to my disappointment I found that this was not so, and all that they talked was a meaningless sort of official jargon.

What I enjoyed, however, because of their spectacular quality, were the functions at the Viceregal Lodge, where I had already attended the Investiture at which my father and uncle were knighted. It had an unreal fairy-like quality even then, and the memory of it has stayed with me as of something seen in a dream. I was still in purdah and my excursion from behind the veil into this dazzling spectacle was rather like Cinderella going to the ball.

That morning I had spent seeing the tombs of Humayun and Safdar Jung, one an example of early and one of late Mogul architecture. Humayun's tomb could be compared with Westminster Abbey. It is associated with the last scene of the tragic drama of the fall of the Mogul Empire, for it was here that Bahadur Shah, the last Mogul emperor, was taken prisoner by the notorious Captain Hudson, and it was here that the two princes, sons of Bahadur Shah, were also taken prisoner and later shot by Hudson at the *Khuni Darwaza*. And that day, exactly seventy-five years after that tragedy, in the same city of Delhi was being held an Investiture by the power that had succeeded the Moguls. A few years only were to go by before this power itself was to disappear and the Empire, on which the sun never set, was to become a thing of the past.

But this did not seem possible that evening in March, 1932, when our car drove up to the Viceregal Lodge. I shall always remember that evening. My father looking magnificent in his colonel's uniform; my uncle very dignified in a Janawar Choga.

As I was in purdah I could not go up with my father and uncle and sit near them. But, as my father was a member of the Viceregal staff, being the Honorary Surgeon to the Viceroy, he knew everybody and had arranged for me to be taken up separately and put in a seat not too far from him. All along the stairs and passages stood, as if carved in stone, the Viceroy's personal bodyguards, all of them at least six feet six inches in height, all wearing brilliant uniforms with black and gold turbans, holding their lances. They struck awe in my heart.

The Investiture was being held in the Mogul Drawing-room of the Viceregal Lodge. This room has a magnificently painted ceiling and beautiful marble columns. It was ablaze with lights. At one end of the room was a raised dais upon which stood two thrones. In the seats facing it sat men in dazzling uniforms with medals and women in gorgeous evening gowns and jewels. Suddenly there was a sort of clinking noise and then my eyes saw a spectacle I have never forgotten. In a box at the side of the dais appeared the Indian princes, resplendent in the brocaded *sherwanis* and Benarasi turbans with jewels scintillating on their chests and swords strapped to their waists. They came, about ten or twelve of them, all at once and stood for a minute before taking their seats. It looked as if all the colour, the pageantry and chivalry that was India was symbolized in them. Barely a few minutes had passed when the Viceroy and Lady Willingdon came slowly up to the dais. Lord Willingdon was an extremely distinguished looking man and looked very elegant in Court Dress; many medals blazed on his chest and from his shoulders hung a blue cape, each corner held by two little page-boys. Lady Willingdon had on a magnificent evening gown and she too wore many medals. She had a diamond tiara on her head and ropes of pearls round her throat. Her cape was also held by two little page-boys, dressed in blue and white. A.D.C.s, Military Secretaries and other members of the Viceregal staff led the procession, which

slowly reached the dais. The Viceroy and Vicereine sat down. It all looked like a tableau.

Soon the Viceroy was standing up. The Investiture had begun. Men were going up to receive their honours from the representative of the King. The G.C.S.I.s, the K.C.S.I.s, the G.C.I.E.s and the K.C.I.E.s came first. The recipients of these were members of the princely order. Then came the G.B.E.s, and K.B.E.s and, after them, the knights. My heart filled with pride as I saw, first my uncle and then my father go up to the dais and kneel on a velvet footstool. I watched the Viceroy touch their shoulders with his sword bidding them rise. After the knights came the Nawabs, the C.S.I.s, and the C.I.E.s, the M.B.E.s, the O.B.E.s, the Kaisar-i-Hinds and many other titles that I do not remember.

At last it was all over. Everybody was leaving. I again found myself being discreetly escorted out by an A.D.C.

Later on many of these titles were returned at the command of the Muslim League. When my father returned his knighthood, it was on a gloomy evening in Calcutta, with the dreadful scenes of the terrible riots still before our eyes and its echoes still ringing in our ears. My mind went back to this night of dazzling splendour. But all this was many years away and meanwhile I had to contend with the dull routine of society life in New Delhi. Fortunately, alongside New Delhi's narrow confines lay the wondrous historic city of Old Delhi, and soon I was to reach out to gather its richness. Delhi is one of those cities that is steeped in 'history, legend, tune and song', for it has been the heart of Indo-Muslim culture for two thousand years.

There have been eight Delhis in all, eight different dynasties have chosen it for their capital. Seven cities lie in ruin around it. In 1932, the eighth Delhi, which was called New Delhi, stood in radiant splendour encircled by the seven other cities, each one once the proud capital of an empire and still containing within its walls monuments of its past glory. Besides

history Delhi is associated with our best poets and writers and in 1933, there still lived there men and women who were typical of its great culture. Mr. Asaf Ali was one of them, Khwaja Hasan Nizami was another. Nawab Sirjuddin Khan Sael was still alive and so was Rashid-ul-Khairi. I had the privilege of meeting them and of listening to their talk. It was indeed a 'liberal education'.

Mr. Asaf Ali, was not only one of the most prominent figures of the Indian National Movement but one of its most charming also. He belonged to Delhi, not only in the sense that he came from one of its oldest families, but because he was the quintessence of its culture. He had the courtesy and the charm, the grace, the elegance and the manner, that undefinable air of breeding which only those nurtured in the best tradition of our culture possess. I have never heard and never shall hear again Urdu spoken as Asaf Ali spoke it. Urdu is essentially a court language; it was born and bred in the court of the Mogul kings. It is capable of extremely subtle nuances. Stressing a single syllable the juxtaposition of a single word, can convey a world of meaning; only a few today know how to do this. Asaf Ali did. He was probably one of the last who knew how to use the language as if it were a musical instrument. It was becoming rare, even in my generation, to hear Urdu spoken in this manner. It makes me sad to think that my children have not even heard the full range of its musical cadence. I was indeed fortunate to have heard it, fortunate to have known persons of such rare quality as Asaf Ali and his young wife, Aruna.

When I met Aruna, even then she had a burning transparent sincerity and I have not been surprised at her subsequent revolutionary career. But I know that she is not the hard-headed revolutionary people imagine her to be but a woman with great sweetness and gentleness of character, capable of tender and deep affection. That is how she was when I met her and that woman I know is still there.

As Asaf Ali was a great friend of my uncle, Syud Hussain, it did not take me long to come to know him and his wife very well. I was soon to be seen very frequently at Asaf Ali's house in Kuchai Chilan, meeting other interesting people and listening avidly to their conversation. Asaf Ali knew the history of every nook and corner, every inch and stone of Delhi, and I would listen spellbound as he told me about it. He knew so many forgotten anecdotes which made the stones live and speak again.

Bhabi, as we all called Mrs. Asaf Ali, gave me my first taste of social service. She got me to become a member of the Delhi Women's League. I did not do anything very much, except attend various lectures given by well-known visitors. The most interesting amongst them and the one I remember the most clearly was by the famous Turkish writer, speaker and politician, Khalida Adeeb Khanam. It seems strange, when I look back on it all, to think that I, who eventually became such an ardent Muslim Leaguer, should have begun my apprenticeship under Aruna Asaf Ali. Little did she suspect the lines on which I would develop later. Little did I know myself.

I also saw a good deal of Mrs. Sarjoni Naidu. She was, without exaggeration, the most interesting, the most vivacious and the most charming person in India. She had a radiant personality which made even the staid and official drawing-rooms of Delhi pulsate with life. She was the most marvellous and interesting conversationalist that I have ever met. She had a fund of anecdotes which she told in her own inimitable manner. They all had more than a little soupçon of malice but her manner of telling them was such that one did not mind the malice, one only enjoyed the fun. She held court—no other word can describe it—at the house of Sir Sri Ram where she usually stayed when she was in Delhi. There would be anything up to thirty or forty people in the room every evening. She would be talking to all of them almost at the same time,

calling them all by their first names and managing to make everyone feel absolutely and completely at home. Her memory was phenomenal; she knew almost everybody and she never forgot a face or a name. She was a great friend of my aunt as well as all the members of my family, but had seen me only when I was ten years old. So I had not expected her even to remember me, but she did. Not only that, when she met me the first time, she remembered that she had heard I had recently married and called out to my husband to come and sit next to her and get properly introduced.

She used to come to Delhi more or less every cold weather and everyone looked forward to her visit. She would ring me up directly she had arrived, fix a date when she would come to dinner with me and order the menu herself. This she did with all her special friends. She liked food, as she liked all good things of life, and to any admonition to be careful, as her health was none too good and rich food was bad for her, she would reply, 'Oh, be quiet! All the doctors that gave me six months have been dead for years.'

And so, before I realized it, our three years in Delhi were over and we were due for a transfer. We should ordinarily have gone back to the Central Province, but we were fortunate to get posted to London, one of the few foreign postings available to Indians at that time.

I had already been to England with my father the year before and had loved it. So I was delighted at the prospect of spending three years there. Though I did not realize it then, these were to be the last years of my life untouched by the stress and strain of politics.

CHAPTER IX

Years in England (1937-1940)

GOING TO England for the first time had a strange charm for me, for it was like seeing something at once familiar and strange. History, legend, tune and song had made every historical and literary landmark familiar to me. I had in my mind's eye seen Westminster Abbey and the Tower, had wandered round Shakespeare's country and visualized Warwick Castle, all that had happened in Hampton Court and Windsor, and I knew every detail of life at Oxford and Cambridge as if I had actually studied there. So to see them all gave me a strange sensation, a feeling of 'I have been here before'. This was true not only of historical buildings but of every aspect of English life.

During the previous visit, I had lived most of the time in a small unspoilt English village, not far from London. I had loved going for long walks in the country, looking at old churches and stopping for tea on farms, eating home-made cakes and masses of bread and butter. I helped in picking salad and gathering strawberries and, as August came, took part in the haymaking and rode back home on a hay-cart. My father had come as a delegate to the British University Conference which was held in Cambridge. So, soon after our arrival in London, we went over to Cambridge where I spent a most interesting three weeks. I stayed at Newnham College, thus getting a taste of the sort of life I had so longed for. It was summer, so the colleges were closed but a number of students had stayed up and I quickly made friends with several.

There were many functions, the historical background of

the University making them very impressive. But what I enjoyed most were the small parties which the Principals of the various Colleges gave to a few delegates at a time. One of these which I remember very clearly was given by the Provost of King's. With his snowy white hair and courtly manners, he looked as if he had stepped out of the eighteenth century. His setting was equally beautiful. We sat round his dinner table whose polished surface mirrored the silver candlesticks, and listened to conversation that sparkled and scintillated like diamonds.

During these weeks I heard more interesting and brilliant conversations than I had ever done before. Miss Strachey who was the Principal of Newnham had a great deal of her famous brother's crisp and caustic wit. Other dons were equally amusing and in their casual remarks often laid open the heart of a matter. I had also made friends with several students and got asked to the famous 'cocoa' parties where all life's problems are discussed with an earnestness which would make an outsider think that the fate of the world depended on the conclusion that this particular group may reach.

Yes, I had thoroughly enjoyed my first visit to England and my glimpse of Europe, and therefore was very pleased indeed when we went to live there. My stay in England began with the Coronation of King George VI and ended soon after the Second World War had been declared. So I can say that I have seen the English people in their hour of triumph and in their hour of tragedy, and I can honestly say that I admired them in both. Anything as good-humoured or tolerant or disciplined as an English crowd is hard to find, and never have I seen a group of people face disaster with less panic and greater equanimity.

I am glad to have seen the Coronation. There are very few things left in this drab and modern world of ours that bring pageantry and colour into our lives and the coronation of a British King and Queen is one of these. It makes history a

reality and tradition a living thing, and it satisfies that innate love which is in every human heart for show and pageantry.

I saw the Coronation procession from Hyde Park Corner where, like the rest of the crowd, we had collected from the early hours of the morning, armed with picnic basket and coffee. We heard the radio describe the ceremony and chatted and exchanged remarks with the crowds. The hours passed quickly and soon it was afternoon, and we heard that the procession had left the Abbey and was already winding its way back to Buckingham Palace. The excitement reached fever pitch as the procession came nearer and nearer Hyde Park. Now the sound of cheering could be heard, now we could see the beginning of the procession: the contingents from the Commonwealth countries resplendent in their varied uniforms, came in their serried ranks. They were followed by line upon line of British soldiers in colourful uniforms: the Highlanders, The Household Cavalry and many others whose regiments I do not know, but they all looked gorgeous as they came in an unending procession; then the cars of the Royal guests and finally, the gold and glass coach of the King and Queen, sceptre in hand, crowns on their heads, they looked like a picture from a book of fairy tales. Just as the procession had passed and even before it was out of sight, the rain which had threatened the whole morning came down. The route was still closed and so we sat and resigned ourselves to getting soaked. At last the road was opened, and for a few minutes the crowd became very disorderly in its efforts to get home. It took us ages to get to our flat which was just at Marble Arch, a few minutes' walk. Next evening I went to the Coronation Ball and I saw the King and Queen, Queen Mary and another dozen or so crowned Heads of Europe, resplendent in their jewels and decorations. As usual, when attending a function of this sort, I felt I was watching a pageant. For several weeks after, there were garden parties, luncheons and receptions. At last it was all over, the corona-

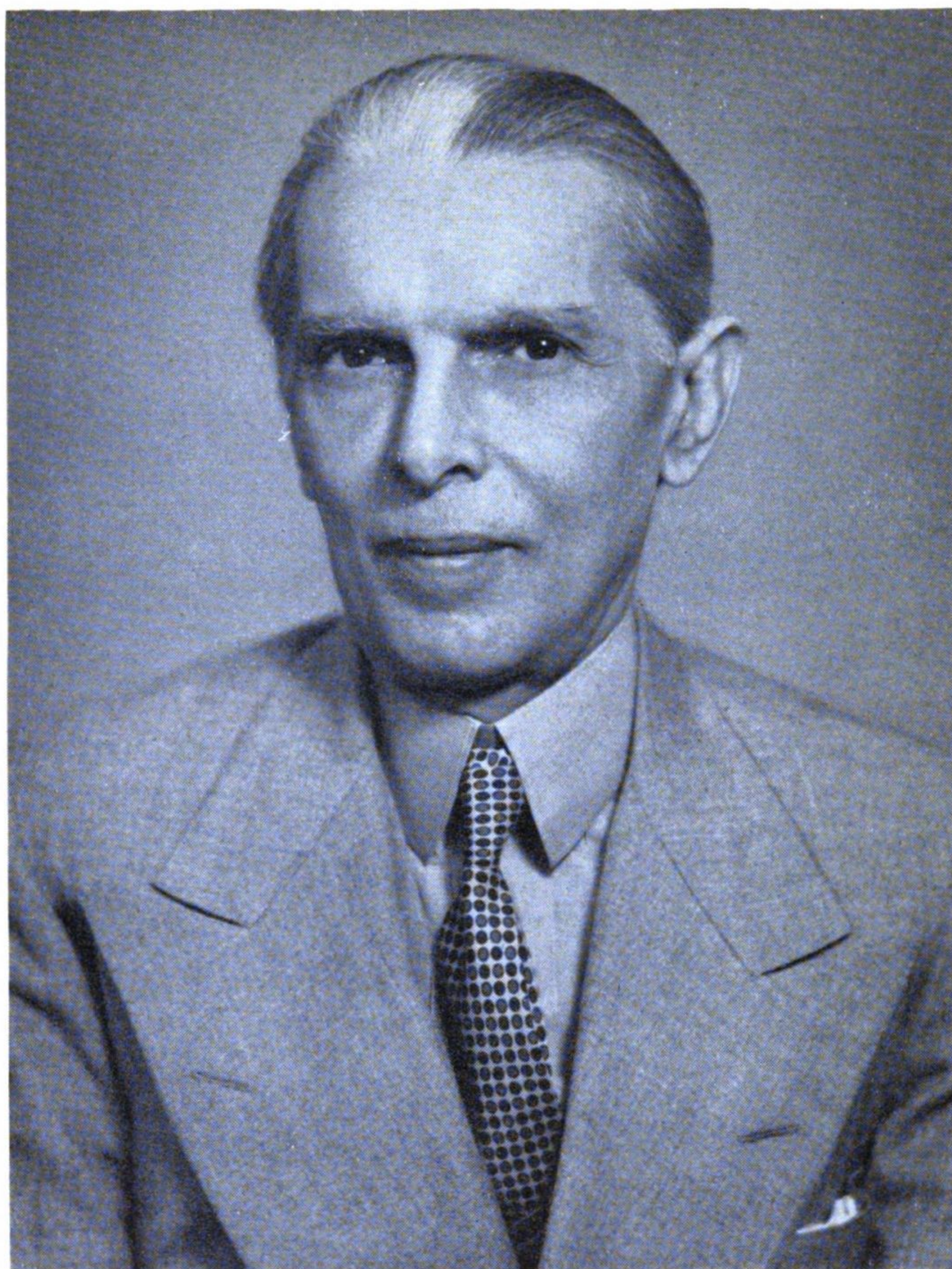
tion visitors left and England settled back to a normal pattern of life.

We found ourselves a small furnished house in Chelsea and settled down to living in England. It did not seem at all strange for I came from that small stratum of society that had adopted the English pattern of life to the minutest detail; cretonne curtains, fender stool, thinly cut bread and butter, cucumber sandwiches and all. Therefore, the inside of my house in Chelsea did not seem very different from my childhood home in Calcutta or my home in New Delhi. Even the food was not strange, for we always ate a typical English breakfast and lunch and dinner were different only in having some Indian dishes added to a three-course English meal. Even the shops did not impress me as they should have done for I had lived in Calcutta where the department stores were as good as any in Oxford Street. Life in England was not different because it was strange to me, but it was different in being much less formal than the replica of it that I had known. Formal calls and stiff dinner parties were things of the past. I myself led a much freer life; even though compared with my English friends I had much more domestic help, I did little chores myself which in India I would not have thought of doing, such as buying my stamps, posting my letters, taking things to the dyers and cleaners, etc. But despite this, I found much more time than in Delhi for I had much less social life to cope with.

The years in London had a great formative influence on my mind and character. They gave me self-confidence and a broader outlook. My ideas began to form and my judgment to mature and in return I could see the hybrid society of New Delhi for what it was and I wondered why I had ever worried about not conforming to its standards. I could indulge to the full my new-found love of the theatre and ballet, and the pleasure of browsing in bookshops. I could even find time, despite the fact that I had now three babies, to resume my

interrupted studies and though I could not complete the course in journalism because it needed more regular attendance, I managed to complete and present a thesis on the development of the Urdu novel and short story. By the time this was completed and presented, war had broken out and the University of London had moved to somewhere in Wales, and it was from there that months after I left England I heard that it had been accepted and I had been given a Ph.D. for it.

Though life moved peacefully and uneventfully, the menace of war came daily nearer. News in the papers began to become definitely alarming, and Hitler's speeches that one heard on the radio became more and more hysterical. The possibility of a war became the constant topic of conversation. Gas masks began to be distributed, trenches were dug and instructions about the black-out were given over the radio. And then, when war seemed a certainty, suddenly the cloud was lifted. Chamberlain came back from Munich with the promise of peace in our time. It was as if we had stood on the edge of a precipice, sure of being pushed over and miraculously had been saved at the last minute. But the respite was for a short while only. In less than a year from then the war came. I took my children and went to Paignton, where I had in any case arranged to go for my holidays. I remember the rush and the crowds at Waterloo station because London was expected to be bombed almost immediately, and therefore children were being evacuated by the thousands. The war was declared after I had been almost a week in Paignton, a week of hope and suspense, for it looked as if once again peace might be saved, but that was not to be. On the 3rd September at eleven o'clock in the morning, we all gathered in the hotel lounge and heard Chamberlain announce that a state of war existed between His Majesty's Government and Germany. It was a solemn moment, and all of us present felt the awful significance of it.



Quaid-i-Azam M. A. Jinnah



With Salma, Naz, and Inam



With my husband, Sarvath, Naz, Salma and Inam

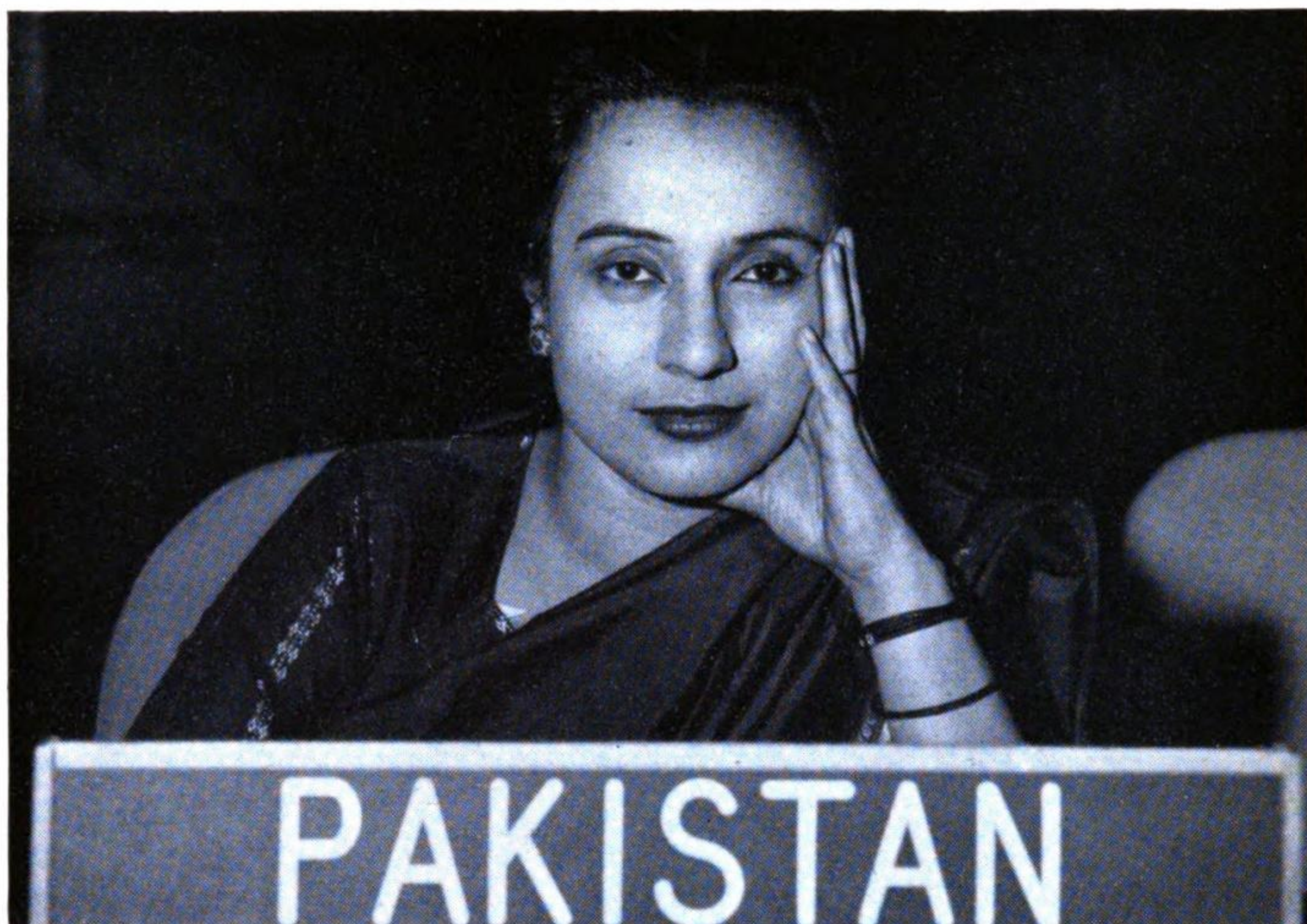


Ceremony of Mirror and Koran, and Putting Ring on Finger,
at Salma's Wedding





Muslim Women's Society First Federation, February 1941



Deputy Chairman of the Pakistan Delegation, 1956-57



With Mrs Pandit at the UN



After receiving PhD,
University of London



With the Queen, Pakistan Stall, British Industries Fair



Sir Hassan Suhrawardy, my father



Nawab Syud Mohammed,
my maternal grandfather



With Shaheed Suhrawardy, Shahid Suhrawardy and my husband

CHAPTER X

The Return Home

I FOUND the Delhi of 1940 much changed from the Delhi I had come to know in 1933. The tone and temper of society were so different that it was difficult to believe that only seven years had passed. In 1933 the pattern in New Delhi had been English; the efforts of the few Indians in the establishment had been to conform as closely as possible with that pattern. Now the number of Indian officials in the Imperial Secretariat had doubled and, as the war progressed and more and more Englishmen left to serve with the armed forces, and yet more officers were needed to cope with the vitally important and continuously increasing work of the War Supply Department, still more Indians found their way into the most coveted posts. So now the number of Indian officers in New Delhi was large enough for them to form a society of their own, and though in this society everything continued in the same manner only 'in a darker shade' to quote Pandit Nehru, yet it existed on its own, separate from the English society, and members of the two groups met only at official functions. Since, due to wartime austerity measures, the Viceregal entertainment was cut down to a minimum, they met very rarely.

But it was not only the fact that there were more Indians in New Delhi that accounted for this separatist tendency; many things had happened during the intervening years to bring about the change. The Congress had gone a long way since the 1922 idyll of Hindu-Muslim harmony. The towering Muslim personalities in it were dead or had severed their connections with the Congress in bitter disappointment. Those

who stayed, though remaining true to their ideals, did not carry sufficient weight. So the Congress that came into power in the eleven Provinces in 1937 was, to all intents and purposes a Hindu party and its first taste of power went to its head. In its twenty-seven months of rule (for the Congress Governments resigned in protest when war was declared) it rode roughshod over Muslim feelings and susceptibilities, thereby causing panic and alarm in their hearts.

The Muslim League had been reorganized in 1937 under the presidency of Mr. Mohammed Ali Jinnah but it was still weak. It had not captured sufficient seats even in the Muslim majority Provinces to form a 100 per cent Muslim League Government, but in each of the Provincial legislatures it was the largest Muslim party; yet when the Congress Ministries were formed in the seven Provinces not one League member found a place in any of them. A Muslim was taken here and there but the Muslims contended that the man thus chosen was a nominee of the Hindus and not their true representative. But weak though the Muslim League was in 1937 it was a mistake for the Congress to ignore it as completely as they did. Of course they did not know that the dynamic personality of Mohammed Ali Jinnah was going to transform that loosely organized ineffectual body into a well-knit, superbly disciplined, organization which in seven brief years was to formulate a demand, gain support for it and achieve what it set out to get. They cannot be blamed for not foreseeing this, one of the greatest miracles of modern times, but they were wrong to ignore the aspirations of the Muslims, because they were not then strong enough to present their case forcefully. In not a single province did Congress try to come to any understanding with the Muslim League Party. But that was not the only instance of their ignoring Muslim sentiments. The heady wine of power went to the head of the Congress Ministries. They passed laws forcing Muslim children to attend government schools which in their tone were com-

pletely Hindu, to salute the Congress flag, to sing the *Bande Mataram*. Petty Hindu officials harrassed Muslims everywhere. A hundred and one small pin-pricks and irritations cropped up daily; unimportant in themselves, they were like the proverbial leaf which indicated the way the wind was blowing, and the indication in this case was that it was blowing towards Hindu imperialism and Hindu domination which would attempt to exterminate eight hundred years of Muslim influence and culture. Alarm and panic swept through the Muslims and resulted in the strengthening of the Muslim League. It also resulted in great bitterness, so that when the Congress Ministries resigned in September 1939, the Muslim League ordered a 'Deliverance-Day' to be celebrated throughout the length and breadth of India.

That is why New Delhi of 1940 was different from that of '33. India had come a stage nearer independence and, because of that, Indians were less eager to ape their rulers. This difference I was to feel almost immediately on my arrival. The second change, namely the growing rift between the two communities, I was not to be aware of for some little while yet. In my three years' absence from India, though bits of news had come to me and every now and then I read an article in some Urdu magazine protesting against Congress attempts to stamp out Urdu or stating the injustices Muslims were suffering under Congress rule, I had not realized its extent.

It was a very trivial incident that brought home to me how Hindu communalism had grown in the last few years. A Hindu friend of mine objected to my using the word 'Begum' as it underlined the fact of my being Muslim. 'Begum' is a word of Turkish origin and was used by Muslim ladies with their first names as a title equivalent to 'Lady'. We had recently begun using it before our surnames as the equivalent of 'Mrs.' and, if anything, it was an anti-English gesture or a simple expression of nationalism. It certainly had no

communal intention, and Hindu objection to it showed the extent of their narrow-mindedness.

But the event that was to change the course of my life was yet to occur. In October, 1941, my father came from England on leave and came to stay with me in my house in New Delhi. One morning he said to me, 'I am going to see Mr. Jinnah. You come along with me.'

'Oh, I don't think I will,' said I. 'I believe he is very rude and snubs everybody.'

'Don't be silly,' said my father. 'That is just Hindu propaganda. I want you to meet him.'

So I went rather reluctantly and apprehensively.

Our house was less than ten minutes' walk from Mr. Jinnah's and in the car it took even less so we arrived a little earlier than ten, which was the time for my father's appointment. We sat down in a small room leading from the hall prepared to wait, but the doorman who had taken in our cards came back and asked us to follow him. To our surprise we found ourselves being led into the dining-room where Quaid-i-Azam and Miss Jinnah, his sister, were still sitting as they had not yet finished breakfast. Thinking that the servant had made a mistake (probably he had), we tried to back out, but before we could do so Quaid-i-Azam got up with a welcoming smile and came towards my father with outstretched hands.

I remember that scene so clearly, the beautifully proportioned room, the early morning sun pouring through the windows, Miss Jinnah sitting looking most elegant at the head of the table that was laid with exquisite china and gleaming silver; Quaid-i-Azam pushing back his chair and getting up on seeing us, his snow-white napkin sliding from his knees as he did so, his quick gesture in stooping to pick it up and put it on the table, and then coming, hands outstretched, with a most radiant smile on his face. He smiled very rarely, but when he did his smile was the kind that lights up the whole

face. That is how I first saw him—and that is how I see him over and over again in my mind's eye, each little detail as clear as if it had happened only yesterday.

My father had certain proposals which he wanted to discuss. He felt that, as Adviser to the Secretary of State for India, he might be able to bring about some sort of understanding between the British Government and the Muslim League. Quaid listened to what Father had to say very attentively and began to explain his point of view. And then, before I knew what I was doing, I was asking Quaid questions and he was answering them!—not impatiently or brusquely but kindly and in great detail. Quaid-i-Azam, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the President of the All India Muslim League, the leader of the majority of the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent, reported to be arrogant and dictatorial, was allowing a completely inexperienced, unimportant young person to argue with him and was taking the trouble of meeting her arguments! The wonder of it did not strike me for the moment as I was carried away by the fascination of listening to Quaid.

Now, after nearly twenty years, during which I have met some very great statesmen, I still maintain that to listen to Quaid and not be convinced was not possible. It was not that he overruled you, it was not that he did not reply to your argument, but that he was so thoroughly, so single-mindedly, so intensely convinced of the truth of his point of view that you could not help but be convinced also. You felt that if a man with an intellect so much superior to yours believed this, then it must be right. Call it hypnotism or what you will, that is the effect he had on me; and I am not the only person on whom he had this effect—he had it on all who came in contact with him. Anyone whom he thought it worth his while to try and convince, he always succeeded in convincing. Even last-ditch opponents like Fazlul Haq and Khizar Hayat have admitted that while face-to-face with Quaid-i-Azam they never dared

to disagree, and they were the premiers of two of the biggest provinces of India and Mohammed Ali Jinnah was only the president of the Muslim League—and the Muslim League, according to these gentlemen, was only a band of ragged ruffians! That he should have thought it worth his while to try to convince me of the rightness of his cause I shall never cease to wonder at. But, because he did so, I am today in Pakistan.

It was ten o'clock when we had come. By one-fifteen Miss Jinnah appeared to remind Quaid that it was time for lunch and that after lunch he had other people coming. My father and I realized with a shock that we had stayed over three hours! It would be trite to say that the hours had flown like minutes.

We apologized profusely and began to take our leave. Both Quaid and Miss Jinnah were very kind and said that we must come again and this time to lunch. The day was fixed and Miss Jinnah very kindly asked me to bring my husband also.

The conversation at the luncheon next week was not as easy as on the morning of my first meeting with Quaid. I suppose the presence of my husband, a Government servant, must have had something to do with it. As a representative of the Government which would have loved to liquidate the Muslim League no less than Congress, it could not be expected that he would have much sympathy with, or understanding of, the Muslim League point of view. He, like all civil servants, had a sort of semi-cynical, semi-humorous attitude towards politics and politicians, and I remember his telling Quaid-i-Azam, 'I am sorry, Sir, but this idea of Pakistan does not appeal to me much. After all, I come from a Muslim minority province; we are only three per cent in the Central Provinces. What do we get out of backing Pakistan? Of course, if you were to plan to reconquer India, I would resign and join up with you immediately.'

Quaid-i-Azam, as is well known, had not much use for

THE RETURN HOME

flippancy, especially where such serious matters were concerned. I remember his pausing for a minute, looking at my husband closely and saying, 'This is not a matter for joking, young man.' But my husband was not much abashed, and continued to enjoy his lunch. We left at about three o'clock and, though I did not know it, I had already taken the first step towards entering the tumultuous life of politics.

CHAPTER XI

The Shadow of Coming Events

A FEW days after my visit to Quaid-i-Azam, three girls from the Indian Parast College for Girls in Delhi came to see me. They said Miss Jinnah had asked them to do so in connection with forming a Muslim Women Students' Federation. There was already an All India Students' Federation, but a year or so ago a separate All India Muslim Students' Federation had been formed owing to the increasing divergencies of opinion and growing bitterness between the two communities, but there was no separate Muslim Women's Student Federation yet. These girls proposed to form one, because as they explained to me they found it increasingly difficult to see eye to eye on many questions with their Hindu fellow-students at college, and had to have a separate organization to be able to voice their point of view. They told me what I had been hearing over and over again in the year I had been back; stories of little pin-pricks, of petty persecutions, of things that in themselves were of no importance but in the tense political atmosphere took on special significance.

I now have only a hazy impression as to what these grievances were. A play had been staged by the Hindu girls that had shown the Muslim rulers to be cruel and intolerant. The Muslim girls had wanted to retaliate and stage a play but this had not been allowed by the Principal on the grounds that it was communal to do so. They had been made to take part in the Congress Independence Resolution Day celebrations, that is the 26th January, but when they had wanted to celebrate the 23rd March, the Pakistan Resolution Day, it had been forbidden. It seems incredible now to think that such

petty and trifling matters could have caused all the heart-burning and resentment and the tenseness and bitterness which resulted in the partition of the country, the uprooting of millions of human beings, the death of nearly a million and destruction of property worth hundreds of millions. And it all began because the Hindus, a nation with thousands of years of civilization behind them, were so petty, and because the Muslims, a people who had defied the might of empires and had won victory over armies many times their size, were afraid that they would be swamped and annihilated. And so, lack of generosity and fear combined to rend the country in two and bring misery to millions.

But in November, 1941, I did not think that these girls' grievances were petty. I was as indignant as they, and agreed to help them to form a separate Muslim Girl Students' organization. I did not know much more than they did how one sets about forming an organization, especially a country-wide one. We had a great deal of enthusiasm, but no experience at all, so we decided that we would go and see Miss Jinnah and ask her how to set about it. She received us very kindly and told us that she had got the Secretary of the All India Muslim Students' Federation to come so that he could advise us how to form a Women's organization on the same lines. All three girls kept strict purdah and so they sat in another room while Miss Jinnah and I talked to Mr. Numan. He told us that the Muslim Women Students' Federation would be a part of the All India Muslim Students' Federation in the same way as the Muslim League Women's sub-committee was part of the All India Muslim League, and that Raja Sahib Mahmudabad would be the President of the whole organization as Quaid-i-Azam was of the Muslim League. Raja Sahib Mahmudabad would appoint me convener (he did so by telegram a few days later) and I would then set about calling the Conference. He told me the procedure of doing so and of drawing up a Constitution etc. We decided

when to hold the Conference and other details, after which Mr. Numan left and Miss Jinnah and I came over and joined the girls. I remember that November afternoon so well. We sat on a hammock on Miss Jinnah's verandah, overlooking her beautiful garden. We sipped our orange juice and rocked ourselves gently, talking over our newly formed plans. It all seemed so easy and so wonderful. Little did I realize what it would lead to, how much bitterness it would cause, how many enemies it would make me, how many friends I would lose. That November afternoon it seemed just a thrilling adventure and nothing more.

I feel at this stage that I must say a little more about Miss Jinnah, for the great part that she has played in bringing the Muslim women forward is not fully realized abroad. Quaid-i-Azam died just a year after the establishment of Pakistan, a year crowded with important work, and since his death she has not sought publicity and limelight. But to those who have the privilege of knowing her, the part she has played in this great drama is well known. So many women now doing very important work for Pakistan were given their first job to do by Miss Jinnah. She is an extremely good judge of character and capabilities and she has a quality especially rare in prominent people that she does not get taken in by flattery. She can assess a person pretty shrewdly almost on the first meeting, but no amount of trying would get you an inch further with her unless she herself wishes it. She is extremely reserved and makes friends with great difficulty. It is my greatest privilege to have enjoyed her friendship for twenty years. Her kindness and advice to me in very difficult times have been invaluable, and when she is a friend she is a real friend, putting her friend's welfare before her own personal interest. Many a time, after I had plunged into Muslim League work, has she restrained my enthusiasm because she realized it was against my interests to go headlong into politics in this way. She has never abused my enthusiasm, and always

understood my difficulties. In short, she has been truly a guide, philosopher and friend.

Finding and setting other women to do useful jobs was by no means Miss Jinnah's only work, though that in itself is no small achievement for not everybody has the knack of finding the right person for the right place or giving the right person an opportunity; wheresoever she went with Quaid-i-Azam she tried to start something useful. The first Women's Industrial Homes in Karachi, Lahore and Quetta were all begun by her in the brief and crowded year when he was Governor-General of Pakistan, or I should really say in the first few months, because towards the end he was ill and she spent her time nursing him in the quiet hill station of Ziarat. In those few months she started not only these Women's Industrial Homes, which have been a pattern and model for others since, but also a 'Women's Relief Committee', which was really the nucleus for the All Pakistan Women's Association of today; most of the workers of the Women's Association got their first training in social work in the Women's Relief Committee. She had planned to convert this into a permanent organization for social service, but here again she did not have the time. She encouraged the Pakistan Women's National Guard; she formed the first women's Dramatic Committee in Karachi which produced an excellent play in aid of refugees within the first four months after the establishment of Pakistan. She had planned to bring out a woman's magazine, and my articles, which were later published as a separate book entitled *Behind the Veil*, were originally written for it.

The shattering blow of Quaid's death which made all Pakistan reel, was, naturally, for her a very great personal loss. It took her some time to get over it. Meanwhile her ideas were put into effect by others. Since then much has happened in Pakistan which has saddened her, but she has refrained from interfering. Her statements on important occasions,

however, are a reminder of the ideals on which Pakistan was founded.

My acquaintance with Miss Jinnah more or less began that evening, but the appreciation of her character and personality came much later after years of association with her. That evening I was thrilled and elated at having met her because she was Quaid-i-Azam's sister and I considered it a great honour that she should have chosen to give me a job to do, and was determined to carry out the task she had entrusted to me to the very best of my ability.

I was, therefore, rather dashed when on going home and relating all this to my husband, he told me that he did not think it was advisable for me to involve myself in politics as I was a Government servant's wife. So far it had been considered wrong for Government servants or their wives to have anything to do with politics. This aloofness of the services constituted their strength as it retained their objectivity, but lately this was breaking down and several wives of Indian civil servants were actively engaged in political work. These were however all Hindus. The Muslim women had so far refrained from doing so because the Muslim League was not yet strong enough, and they were afraid to associate themselves with an unpopular party. The very fact that this was the argument advanced to keep me from participating in the League activities made me more determined to do so. I was determined to prove that I at least was not afraid! In my youthful egoism I did not realise that it was not I but my husband who would have to face the attendant awkwardness, and strangely enough, though he objected to my taking part in politics at that stage, he did not do so later on, and I have often wondered at this, and have felt that it must be due to the fact that by that time he himself had begun to accept the inevitability of the old order changing completely.

Now that the heat of the battle is over and I can look back on events calmly, I feel that while in a time of national

resistance to foreign domination it is right for all rules to be broken, it is not a good thing at other times for wives of Government servants to take part in politics. This rule should be enforced again, for Government servants' involvement in politics has been responsible for many administrative ills since the establishment of Pakistan.

For the next few weeks my energies were completely taken up in the task of organizing the Conference. Though it was not going to be a very large affair it was still on All India scale. I had issued invitations to Muslim Girls' Colleges of Lahore, Aligarh, Lucknow, Meerut and Nagpur, and expected about fifty delegates. My chief worry was to find accommodation for them, and as all the girls were in purdah and could not use buses or trams, transport also presented a great difficulty. A Girls' Conference was a completely new thing. It meant a great responsibility for me, as I was the only person who was not a student. If anything went wrong, the others would be excused on the score of their youth and inexperience, and I would get all the blame. I got no help from my friends in New Delhi. They were the wives of officials and did not want to get into trouble by taking part in politics. Nearly every one of these ladies today considers herself an ardent Muslim Leaguer and would have it believed that she has always been so. One who is now in the forefront of social and political activity in Pakistan on that occasion refused even to buy a Reception Committee ticket, saying—'I am sorry my husband is a Government servant. I do not want to have anything to do with the Muslim League.' When her pretensions get on my nerves, I feel a malicious desire to remind her of this incident, but so far my better nature has prevailed.

Yes, in '40-'41, there were very few people who were prepared to associate themselves with the Muslim League and yet, though our numbers were few, there was amongst us such a spirit of comradeship, such an earnest desire to serve, that it more than made up for our lack of numbers. We worked

with no feeling of rivalry, without any desire for 'kudos' or publicity, our one wish was to serve the Muslim cause which we felt was going by default.

As the day came nearer, I got more and more apprehensive, and it was with a great feeling of nervousness that I went to meet the train from Lahore which was bringing the first contingent of the delegates. Fortunately for me, this first delegation was led by Fatima Begum. Her warm and affectionate greeting and whole-hearted encouragement of what I was doing gave me great confidence. Fatima Begum was one of our veteran leaders of women's emancipation. She had known my aunt and other members of my family, and although this was the first time I had met her, she treated me as if she had known me all my life. I told her apologetically of my very inadequate arrangements but she waved my excuses aside and by her presence and encouragement immediately gave our effort, which so far was being looked upon merely as a piece of youthful folly, a much better status. I owe a great debt of gratitude to her for had this, my first venture, failed, I think I would not have gone on with my political career.

Throughout the day I kept meeting trains bringing delegates from all over India. We were very disappointed that Miss Jinnah, who had promised to open the Conference, was unable to come owing to ill health. The sessions of the Conference began at eleven o'clock with Fatima Begum reading a few verses from the Koran in her sonorous voice. It was followed by Begum Aizaz Rasul's presidential address, the printed copies adding importance to our amateurish proceedings. The attendance was very poor and I was rather disappointed because we, that is to say the girls of my organizing committee and I, had gone practically from door to door asking ladies to come. If even those whom we had personally asked had done so there should have been enough to fill half the room. But, as it was, barely the first three rows were occupied. I

always mention this, for it shows how little interest in politics there was amongst women in February '42 and how quickly and rapidly political consciousness grew, for in March, 1947, when in this self-same hall we organized a meeting of the Muslim League Women's Sub-Committee which Quaid-i-Azam honoured by coming and addressing, the hall was packed to capacity; there was no standing room in the corridors running around it and, though nothing could be seen from the garden, hundreds of women were standing there as well.

The Conference lasted three days and followed the usual procedure. Subject committee meetings were held, resolutions passed, and speeches made. Though it is quite a few years ago now, I can remember every detail of the proceedings very clearly and most of the speeches; I think they are a fair indication of what most of us at that time felt about the political situation. None of us had really pushed the idea of Pakistan to its logical conclusion. The demand for Pakistan was an assertion of our separate, independent, religious and cultural existence. We feared and objected to the assimilation being attempted, for we were proud of our culture and wanted to keep it intact. We wanted political power to enable us to preserve it. If we could have been assured that our religion, language and culture would be respected, that it would be possible for us to live our own way of life, then we would not have forged ahead and fought for political independence, which we did not originally seek. From the days of the Montague-Chelmsford reforms to the Communal Award of 1933, we merely wanted safeguards. We wanted them because we were frightened that the economically superior and technically more advanced Hindus would swamp and over-rule us.

But it was dawning on our leaders that if we wished to preserve our culture, then we must have a country of our own to enable us to do so. And that is why, after only three years

as President of the Muslim League, Quaid-i-Azam had already put forward the resolution that the Muslim majority contiguous areas should form a separate sovereign state of Pakistan. The Lahore Resolution, as this epoch-making resolution was called, had been passed in March, 1940, that is six months after the Second World War had begun, and it was now February '42.

However, to the majority of Muslims Pakistan was an idea rather than a reality, something they thought was their inviolable right but which they had not yet decided to exercise. The most ardent of Muslim leaders at this stage still hoped that it would be possible to come to a compromise which would enable Muslims to continue as a separate cultural entity within a wider political framework. Quaid-i-Azam himself favoured this. I definitely remember him telling me at that first meeting we had with him that the Canadian Constitution would probably be the best solution for us, and the fact that for seven years after the passing of the Pakistan Resolution he agreed to discuss and negotiate with the British and Congress and more than once almost came to agreement, is further proof. That an agreement was not reached is not because of Quaid-i-Azam's intransigence but because of the narrow-mindedness and bigotry of the Congress hierarchy.

Much of what I have just said may not have been very clear to us at this stage, but there was no doubt in our minds that we stood in danger of the annihilation of our culture and that if we wanted to preserve it and our separate entity we had to organize ourselves into an effective body. This the Muslim League was enabling us to do, and therefore was daily succeeding in getting more and more support.

The Conference came to an end after the passing of the resolution supporting the demand for the establishment of Pakistan and for the preservation and development of Urdu, and some other resolutions concerned exclusively with students' affairs. It had been a modest little affair, but it was the begin-

ning of political consciousness amongst Muslim women, and, as such, was of great importance. For me personally it was an achievement. I had more or less single handed organized and called an All India Conference, and brought it successfully to a conclusion. I felt exhausted but very elated as I drove the delegates back to the station to catch their trains.

CHAPTER XII

History in the Making

IN APRIL, 1943, the All India Muslim League held its Annual Session in Delhi. This was one of the most important sessions of the League since the passing of the Pakistan Resolution at its Lahore Session, three years before. Much had happened since. The Muslim League had grown tremendously in importance and had had to face many difficulties. It was only Quaid-i-Azam's leadership that had managed to steer it clear of pitfalls and dealt with each crisis in a manner which made it come out at the end stronger than before.

Congress had followed the resignation of its Ministries by launching a fully-fledged direct movement against the British.

The 1942 disturbances, as they were called, were really an abortive rebellion. They did not succeed because the British took prompt and drastic measures, but despite that they caused tremendous loss of life and property. So much has happened since August, 1942, that it is now forgotten how widespread were the risings and what havoc they caused. Railroads were torn up, post offices burnt down, officers were burnt and injured. For at least three days the Government in several places came to a standstill and arson and looting took place everywhere. The British regarded this as a stab in the back; their somewhat amusedly tolerant attitude towards Congress changed to one of bitterness, at least for the time being. All the Congress leaders were clapped in gaol and kept there for almost the duration of the war. Congress regarded this as completely against the principles for which the war was

supposedly being fought, namely the right of nations to be free.

The Muslim League kept itself aloof from this movement and was criticized by Congress, and by the Nationalist Muslims as well, for not taking part in what was, from their point of view, a war of liberation. Quaid-i-Azam kept the League aloof and prevented it from getting involved in violence because he did not think it was strong enough to withstand the repercussions that would have followed. Congress could and did; for it had been organized forty years ago. It was now sufficiently entrenched to risk taking direct action and its leaders being arrested without running the risk of completely going to pieces. But the League could not; it was still at the stage of being welded together. Had its leaders been put in gaol in 1942, or I should say its leader for it only had Quaid-i-Azam, it would have broken up. He realized that for the League to plunge into action before it was strong enough internally would be suicidal. The oft-flung accusation that he was frightened of going to gaol weighed nothing with him, for he was a man who was swayed neither by praise nor blame. I do know that this made him seem cold and aloof, but had he not been such a man he could not have done what he did, that is—to quote his own words: ‘make a disorganized mob into a disciplined nation’.

To achieve this end it was necessary not only to keep the Muslim League from precipitate action but also to restrain some of its prominent members from taking independent unco-ordinated action. While he did not think the League was ready for direct action he was not in favour of whole-hearted co-operation in the war effort because he felt that the Muslim point of view was not receiving the consideration it deserved from the British. This involved him in direct conflict with prominent Muslim Leaguers among whom was Mr. Fazlul Haq, the Chief Minister of Bengal. His refusal to resign from the Defence Council when asked by the League to do so caused the first serious crisis in its ranks.

Bengal was the largest Muslim majority province and Fazlul Haq had a tremendous personal following there. He had a party of his own known as the Krishak-Proja Party, and after the 1937 elections when the League had captured a great number, but not the majority of the seats in Bengal he had made an alliance with the Muslim League and formed a coalition government. Later, as a reaction to the narrow-minded policy of Congress ministers in other provinces, he had declared himself to be a Muslim Leaguer and had become one of its staunchest supporters. In fact the first resolution demanding the establishment of Pakistan was moved by him in Lahore in March, 1940. There were those who thought that if Fazlul Haq withdrew his support from the League it would collapse in Bengal, but not so Quaid-i-Azam. He took disciplinary action against Fazlul Haq by expelling him, which caused a terrific furore.

It is difficult to realize now what a tremendously bold and courageous step it was for Quaid-i-Azam to take. At that juncture, that is in 1941, the League was still a very small and unimportant organization, while Fazlul Haq was one of the giants of the Indian sub-continent. He maintained, and there were many then to support him, that he was every bit as good as Quaid-i-Azam himself and was not going to take orders from him. The same point of view was held by many other prominent men with the same personal vanity. Every one of them, pre-eminent in his own sphere, felt that they could not take orders from a man who, till very recently, had been a colleague of theirs. This was unfortunate as it deprived the League of the advice and counsel of men eminently fitted to give it, and accounts today for there being so few to carry on the work now that the Quaid is gone.

Quaid-i-Azam's point of view was that you could not have an effective organization unless it was disciplined and the organization could not be disciplined if its members, no matter how prominent they might be, refused to abide by its

rules. It was in its trial of strength with Fazlul Haq that the League really proved its mettle.

This was the greatest crisis that it had had to face since it had been reorganized under the Presidency of Quaid-i-Azam, and a similar situation could be seen looming up in Punjab. Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, the Premier of the Punjab, had belonged to the Unionist Party of the Province but had become a member of the Muslim League though continuing to head a predominantly Unionist Cabinet. He had readily resigned from the Defence Council when asked by Quaid-i-Azam to do so. Unfortunately he died soon afterwards and his successor, Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana, was completely under the sway of his Hindu colleagues in the Punjab, and though not openly declaring himself against the League, would not commit himself to supporting it either. This boded trouble and Quaid-i-Azam knew it. He had paid several visits to the Punjab since the momentous session of 1940 and had talked to Khizar, trying to make him see reason, but nothing decisive had yet happened.

Because all these things had happened since the Lahore Session the forthcoming session in Delhi was of great importance.

Since my meeting with Quaid-i-Azam, I had begun to get more and more involved in League activities. My cousin, Shaheed Suhrawardy, had taken the place of my uncle, Sir Abdullah Suhrawardy, in Muslim politics in Bengal. He was the general secretary of the Bengal branch of the League and it was mainly due to his organizational ability that, in 1937, it had been able to capture the number of seats that it had. When the coalition government had been formed with the Krishak-Proja Party of Fazlul Haq, he had become the Finance Minister, and when the government had been dissolved he had resigned. He came to Delhi a great deal when he was a minister and also subsequently to discuss matters of policy with Quaid-i-Azam, and as he stayed at my house

during his visits, my home became a sort of Muslim League committee room.

Important persons connected with the League's activities kept on dropping in and out and we never had less than ten or twenty for a meal. Press interviews, Press conferences, Press statements and other political activities went on there. It was very exciting and interesting to get a peep at the inside workings of great events and I even tried, now and then, to take a hand in them. One of my earliest efforts was an attempt to persuade Fazlul Haq to come back to the Muslim League. The most remarkable thing about this incident is that I was accompanied on this errand by Sardar Aurangzeb Khan. Sardar Aurangzeb Khan was a very old-fashioned person and came from the North-West Frontier Province, which is noted for its orthodoxy and conservatism, and Fazlul Haq was staying at Dargah Nizamuddin Aulia, the citadel of conservatism, and yet my going there was not objected to. In fact, Sardar Aurangzeb Khan was very pleased that I should be doing this for he regarded it not as bold and unseemly but as an effort to help the community and so very creditable. It was this changed attitude that enabled women to come into public life so quickly.

By now the Muslim League had sufficient following amongst the people and had fired their imagination so that the forthcoming session of the Muslim League was being looked forward to with great eagerness and feverish preparations were being made days ahead for its reception. The excitement increased as it approached.

From early in the morning the day the session was to be held the people began gathering in the streets, for Quaid-i-Azam was to be taken in procession from his house in Aurangzeb Road, New Delhi, to where the session was to be held—a distance of five or six miles, and by the afternoon they were packed tight. We lost Delhi because it is said that more than half of its population was Hindu, but on that day it was

difficult to believe that the entire population of Delhi was not only Muslim but Muslim Leaguers. The house of one of my friends was on the route of the procession and I had got there fairly early and had taken my children with me. It was April and, because of the crowding, very hot. I began to get worried that I had brought the children, but I am glad I did so, for that day was one worth remembering, and they do remember it. There was terrific excitement amongst the crowds and a feeling of elation and expectation. At least there was something to hope for and work for. Not only were the roads packed to capacity but the terraces of the houses were crowded and from the windows women threw rose petals as Quaid's lorry slowly wended its way. He was profusely garlanded and was sitting on a chair in the open lorry taking the salutes of the people with the characteristic gesture of raising his hand to a half salute. Alongside him sat the Secretary of the Delhi Provincial Muslim League, Hussain Malik.

As soon as the procession was out of sight, I slipped out of the house and after arranging for the children to be taken home, went off to where the conference was to be held. By dint of going through by-lanes and streets, I managed to arrive a few minutes before the procession got there. The huge *Shamiana* (marquee) was densely packed and the crowd waited in excited anticipation for Quaid to arrive. Deafening shouts of 'Allah-o-Akbar', 'Quaid-i-Azam Zindabad', 'Pakistan Zindabad' heralded his approach. For a while pandemonium nearly broke loose but almost immediately a hush fell. The crowd of its own accord divided into two allowing a passage for Quaid to walk through from the entrance of the *Shamiana* to the *pandal*. I remember the scene clearly—Quaid coming in slow measured steps, followed and preceded by members of the Executive Committee, the crowd silent, tense and moved with deep emotion as he got to the dais. Cries of 'Allah-o-Akbar' and 'Quaid-i-Azam Zindabad' resounded once more. He raised his hand to accept the cheers

and then after a couple of minutes made a gesture for the crowd to be silent, and in an instant they were silent. I was to see this happen over and over again. A tense, excited crowd charged with emotion, was, in the Quaid's presence, a controlled and disciplined crowd. A gesture, sometimes a mere look, would ensure silence and control. Quaid took his seat, and Maulana Akram stepped forward and read the verses of the Koran in a voice charged with emotion and then the League flag, white crescent and stars on a green ground, was unfurled and the strains of the popular song, 'This moon is not one that shall ever remain in eclipse' floated in the air. The crowd took up the refrain. The sixth session of the All India Muslim League had begun.

Next morning Quaid delivered his marathon Presidential address lasting for nearly three hours. The speech was not only eloquent but clear, well thought out and completely logical. Even today I can remember practically every point he made and several sentences by heart. He analysed the League's attitude towards the British; he explained his refusal to plunge it into direct action; he went over the difficulties that the League had to contend with since its last meeting.

The news that the Fazlul Haq Ministry in Bengal had fallen had come through that morning, and Hasan Ispahani had told me this a few seconds before Quaid arrived. This meant such a triumph for us that a person ordinarily as sober as Hasan Ispahani was beside himself with exultation, and when he told me the news I could hardly restrain myself from shouting with joy, but the crowds still did not know.

Quaid now announced it in a most dramatic way. He said: 'For the last sixteen months the Muslims of Bengal have been harassed and persecuted by a man who, I am sorry to say, is a Mussulman.' He went on to praise the discipline and endurance of the Muslims of Bengal and said: 'Today it has been rewarded. For I have just got the news that the Haq Ministry has been forced to dissolve because of a successful

vote of no-confidence by the Muslim League.' This announcement was greeted by thunderous cheers and as they died down, Quaid hammered in the point, i.e., how by discipline and unity, by keeping our ranks unbroken we could defeat the biggest and the strongest of our opponents.

Then he went on to the question of the Punjab. I had noticed Khizar Hayat Tiwana quietly slipping into a seat soon after Quaid had started his Presidential address and he looked thoroughly deflated as Quaid said in a voice as clear and incisive as a razor's edge: 'Punjab is the corner-stone of Pakistan. It is destined to play a leading role in its affairs. It is not being allowed to do so by a handful of men. I have been very patient with Punjab's politicians;' but he warned, 'I cannot allow the wishes of the people to be flouted by a handful of men any longer and I want the politicians of Punjab not to go on ignoring their people's desire.'

And so, for two and a half hours and more we listened to Quaid's speech. He did not falter or stop once and did not even take a sip of the water which was often sent to him.

Most of the audience did not know English. As a matter of fact, it would be more correct to say that very few of them knew it, so they could not understand what Quaid was saying and yet, such was his personality that they listened spellbound for such a long time. I was to see this over and over again. At last the speech was over and limp and exhausted from so much emotion, we all went home.

That afternoon there was a dinner at Liaquat Ali Khan's house, followed by a *Quwwali*. We all sat on the open terrace of that beautiful house. Quaid came out and sat amongst the guests, looking happy and relaxed. This was the first time I had seen him sitting on *farsh*,* but he looked perfectly at ease; very rarely do I remember seeing him look as happy as he did that evening. The ladies were clustering round Miss Jinnah and I was amongst them. She caught a glimpse of me and

*Carpeted floor.

asked me to come over and sit nearer to her. As I got up to pick my way towards her, she turned to Quaid, who was sitting not very far off, saying:

‘You know this girl has done a wonderful job for the League. She has brought its message into official circles.’

Quaid looked at me and gave me a radiant smile of approval which made me feel I was in the seventh heaven. He asked me:

‘Were you at the session today?’

‘Oh yes’, I replied, ‘I thought you were wonderful. You did not even drink water once.’

‘Is that all that impressed you?’ he said, rather amused.

That was a happy evening. Soon the *Quwwals* began strumming their instruments and the plaintive chorus of *shikwa* and *jawab-e-shikwa* floated in the air. This poem is an intensely intimate and personal appeal to God at the plight of the Muslim nation and God’s reply, the most audacious and imaginative of all Iqbal’s poems. The part that poetry has played in our national movement is considerable. Not only can it be said that we marched to our goal of Pakistan to the strains of Iqbal’s poetry, but single poems such as ‘The Shikwa’ and Mian Bashir Ahmad’s ‘Milat Ka Pasban Hai . . .’ have had greater influence on the minds of the people than any number of political pamphlets and speeches.

Two more days of the session were taken up by meetings of the Executive Committee (*in camera*) and open sessions at which most of the prominent members of the Muslim League spoke, some of them with great distinction, but the scene was dominated by Quaid and Quaid alone. On the last day there was an evening session which lasted well into the night. At this Bahadur Yar Jung spoke. He was a most eloquent and fiery speaker and once the audience had got a glimpse of him on the dais it was impatient to hear him. The crowd began to get restive and a slow murmur which sounded like the dull rumblings of thunder could be heard as speaker after speaker got to his feet and Bahadur Yar Jung was still

not called. Quaid was well aware of all this and amusedly tolerant of it, but still would not give way. When the crowd's impatience seemed to grow, he smiled and said: 'Do not be impatient. You will hear him. Wait just a little longer.' At that one sentence the impatience of the crowd melted away and they cheerfully settled down to listening to the rest of the speakers. At last Quaid called Bahadur Yur Jung. He was a true orator and knew how to play on the emotions of his audience, and the Urdu language lends itself to this; he was its master and used every conceit and device in it for his purpose. He began by saying:

'I get up to speak only when the lady of the night has already opened her dark tresses, but tonight they are falling not only to her shoulders but to her knees.' In English translation it sounds like a forced artifice, but in Urdu it made a beautiful imagery. Then he went on to speak of the glorious past of the Mussulman and the glorious future that awaited him. Yet, unlike my clear recollection of Quaid's speech, my impression of Bahadur Yar Jung is rather a hazy one. One listened to him as if bewitched, but afterwards one could remember it only as something one had heard in a dream.

It was the early hours of the morning before the session was over, and as I drove back to my home in New Delhi its uniform rows of whitewashed houses, silent and symmetrical, presented a great contrast to the scene and excitement I had just left behind. I dropped two other ladies, also wives of officials, at their houses and slowly crept into mine.

My work during the session had mainly been in connection with the reception and accommodation of women delegates but this time I was not alone. The members of the Delhi Branch of the All India Muslim League Women's Sub-Committee were with me. This had come into being as early as 1938 with the object of creating political consciousness amongst Muslim women. By a resolution passed by the Patna Session in that year six women from various parts of

the country had been nominated to form committees in their provinces. So far these had remained rather inactive, but now they were being galvanized into action. During this session there were Executive Committee meetings and an open session exclusively for women, presided by Lady Haroon, at which representatives of the various branches submitted an account of their work. It was not very long or remarkably interesting for the work that was actually done, but it was significant as it showed how rapidly women were becoming politically conscious. This was being brought about not only by the stress of events but was directly encouraged by Quaid-i-Azam. He did it without saying much, but in little ways, such as making Miss Jinnah, his sister, always sit on the dais and, because she did, other ladies could also do so and Quaid's proximity protected them from any rude remarks by the audience, which gradually got used to the idea of women being present and participating in public meetings. Quaid believed in women's emancipation. At his memorial meeting at the Caxton Hall in September, 1948, Miss Agatha Harrison said that when he was a student in England the Suffrage Movement was at its height and very unpopular. Young Jinnah was one of the few people who attended meetings and spoke in support of it. She added, 'Even then he was not afraid to support an unpopular cause'; and so he remained throughout his life.

CHAPTER XIII

Heading Towards a Crisis

EVENTS BEGAN to move very quickly from now onwards. The Muslim League had become a power to be reckoned with. Quaid had made good his claim that there were not two but three parties concerned with the Indian problem; the British, the Hindu and the Muslim. In less than five years he had so organized the Muslims and steered them past pitfalls that no decision could be taken regarding the future of India without the full consent and co-operation of the League. By this time, the war in Europe had also reached its last phase; an Allied victory seemed to be a certainty, which meant that the question of India's future must be decided soon. Lord Wavell flew over to London early in 1945 to discuss the question with the British Government and on his return called a conference in Simla. The congress leaders, most of whom had been arrested after the terrible riots of 1942, were released to enable them to attend this conference. Mr. Jinnah who had been recovering from a serious illness also went up to Simla.

The summer capital of the British Empire, which was usually the scene of nothing more exciting than Viceregal garden parties or other official functions, now suddenly became the stage on which the last critical acts of the Indo-British drama were being enacted. The whole place became alive. Journalists were the first to come, and they came by the dozen in anticipation of 'scoops' and stories. Then one by one the leaders arrived. Pandit Nehru, Maulana Azad, Asaf Ali, Rajagopalacharya, Pandit Pant and other notables of the Congress all came and processions plied two or three times a

day through the narrow streets of Simla to the station and back to the hotels in which they were staying. As they were Government guests, they were put up in either the Hotel Cecil or the Grand Hotel.

The excitement reached fever pitch as the time for Mr. Jinnah and Gandhi's arrival drew near. How well I remember every single detail of the day of Quaid-i-Azam's arrival in Simla! The route which he was to pass on his way to the Hotel Cecil had been packed to capacity since the early hours of the morning, and it was with great difficulty that I somehow managed to secure a place at about 9.30 a.m. Quaid must have arrived at about 11 a.m. or so, but the time that we waited did not seem long as a crowd bound together in common devotion or admiration is a very companionable one. As soon as Quaid's rickshaw had passed us, the crowd broke up, everyone trying to get to the entrance of Hotel Cecil and catch another glimpse of him there.

I had by this time become a complete political addict, and during the whole period of the Simla Conference went about drinking up political gossip with an avidity that would have done credit to a newspaper reporter. I was in a particularly fortunate position to do this. In the Grand Hotel, where I was staying, was also our dear friend Mr. Asaf Ali, a prominent leader of the Congress; in fact one of the few prominent Muslims to be found in their ranks. Despite fundamental differences of opinion and outlook, he still had the same affection for us, and we for him. So we spent a great deal of time with him.

The Begum Mohammad Ali, wife of that staunch fighter for the Muslims of India, Maulana Mohammad Ali, had also come to stay in the Grand Hotel. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu had also arrived and was staying in the house of a friend, not far from there. As I knew all these people personally and each of them was a protagonist in the drama that was being

enacted, I was certainly getting a cross-section of news and views.

Khwaja Nazimuddin, the Chief Minister of Bengal—where alone a Muslim League Ministry held sway—was staying with the President of the Assembly, who was a relative of mine and whose house, Hallcombe, was a few yards from the Cecil Hotel where most of the members of the Muslim League Working Committee stayed. Lunches at Sir Abdur Rahim's house were almost informal meetings of the Muslim League Working Committee. I had the opportunity of gathering a lot of inside information and I found it very interesting to watch the reactions of people on whom so much depended. It was amazing to see how Quaid's personality dominated them even when he was not present. There were decisions of his which they disagreed with or did not agree with wholeheartedly, but not one of them had the courage to express his difference of opinion before him. It irritated me to see men in eminent positions, called in to give advice on matters of moment, hesitating to express their opinion honestly and with the audacity which goes with lack of experience. I could not refrain from saying this once, but of course my interruption was ignored, as it deserved to be. Looking back on these events, I realize that these men did not dare to express their differences, because none of them had the courage of their convictions, which Quaid possessed. Their motives were mixed and because of this they could not stand up to the single-minded conviction with which Quaid pursued his point of view.

It was during the Simla Conference that I managed to get the opportunity of seeing and talking to Quaid a great deal. I would go to see him almost every day, staying sometimes only for a brief period and leaving after making polite inquiries about his health, and other times staying for quite a while listening to him explaining his point of view on the controversial issues then at stake. This was a unique privilege

and I am really very glad that I got this opportunity, though, looking back on it now, I am amazed at my audacity. To realize the extent of it, one has to know the awe and reverence in which Quaid was held. He had the reputation for being aloof, unapproachable and remote. Even the members of the Working Committee did not dare to see him without an appointment and that I should have the temerity to do so can only be explained by the naïveté of youth. I did so, in the first instance, on an impulse, impelled by my desire to see Quaid. After I had seen the procession of Quaid's arrival, I had rushed to the Hotel Cecil and thought that I had covered the distance in record time. I got to the lounge too late. He had already gone upstairs to his room, everybody was still standing around, and seeing me said: 'You only just missed him. He has just gone upstairs.' I was terribly disappointed, and I took my courage in both hands and decided to go upstairs. I hoped to see him in the passage, but he had already gone inside. The Pathan doorkeeper knew me from Delhi, he gave me a broad grin of welcome and allowed me to knock timidly at the door. Quaid opened it tentatively, wondering who was bothering him again so soon after the excitement of the reception. Seeing me, he very kindly held the door farther open and invited me in. I stayed a few moments only to make some inquiries about his health and about Miss Jinnah who had stayed behind because of illness.

The detractors of Quaid often say that he was arrogant, ungracious and rude. I can only say to this that I never found him so. He was aloof certainly and did not find it easy to make conversation, nor did he try to exercise the facile charm which so many political leaders put on. But I always found him extremely courteous, patient and kind, not only during the fortnight or so in Simla, when I saw him almost every day, but also later on in Delhi where I saw him fairly frequently whenever he came up.

I still continued to meet a number of prominent Congress

leaders. I was constantly hearing their point of view, which raised doubts in my mind and I would say to them, 'I will go and ask Quaid' and I did. He always patiently explained the reason for his decision to me and I would go back convinced. So it became a joke and whenever I said, 'All right I shall ask Quaid', my husband would say, 'What is the use? He will say, "Begum Ikramullah, you do not understand", he will explain his point to you and you will come back convinced.'

He did not try to win people over by emotional appeal or cheap flattery. His appeal was always to the intellect and his reasoning was clear and logical. He expected people who joined the Muslim League to suffer for it. He did not consider that they were doing him a personal favour by it or were justified in taking a martyred or heroic attitude. Therefore, when the *Hindustan Times* printed an article attacking me, I went to Quaid seething with indignation. I did not find him very sympathetic. Even today I am extremely sensitive to criticism and this was my first taste of it. It had upset me greatly. Quaid sensed my uneasiness and asked what the matter was. 'Have you seen the *Hindustan Times*?' I asked. 'Yes,' he replied. 'There is a nasty article in it attacking me,' I said. There were always stacks of newspapers by Quaid's chair. He took the *Hindustan Times* from the pile, turned to the page I had mentioned and glanced over it. Then he carefully folded the paper and put it back, without saying anything to me for a moment or so. Then he said: 'Every day the newspapers say much worse things about me. What would happen if I let it upset me? This is to be expected.' I felt abashed and rather disappointed for I had expected lashings of sympathy, instead of which I had an astringent put on my wound. When I rose to leave, he added: 'You must not let small things upset you.' In later years, when I have encountered meanness and malice, I have remembered these words of Quaid.

Tension was growing daily and the communal feeling was

even poisoning social relationships. Several of my Hindu friends dropped me completely, and the relationship with others also became rather strained and difficult. On one occasion at an after-dinner parlour game, disparaging remarks were made about Quaid-i-Azam which made me flare up and so cause a scene. Here, again, when I repeated the story to Quaid, he made me see what a trivial matter it was. I mention this because he has been accused of personal vanity. Had that charge been true he would not have considered even a silly attack on him as a trivial matter. It also shows his patience and forbearance in allowing me to discuss such trivialities, realizing that to me they did not appear as such and that I might need a training which he tried to provide. I think it was a rare privilege, almost a unique one and it has left its impact on my life for ever. There are not many people who enjoyed this privilege, but those few who did, became, like me, staunch adherents, and their faith in him was unshakeable.

My husband had not seen Quaid for two years, when we had all lunched at his place. But at the end of the Simla Conference, when I went to say goodbye to Quaid, he came to pick me up and met Quaid again. He discussed the cause that had led to the failure of the Simla Conference, and I remember his looking very thoughtful and preoccupied as we stood at the door of the Hotel Cecil waiting for our rickshaw to be called. Then looking at the hills, remote and silent witnesses to human conflict and turmoil, he said: 'You're right. He really means to have Pakistan.' 'Of course, he does,' I said indignantly.

That was so but it was not because Quaid disregarded other people's points of view or forced his opinion on them, he did not. Not even on anyone as unimportant as myself. Only he had what few people possess in this world, an absolutely single-minded conviction. It somehow had the effect of removing all one's doubts. To say that he was a

dictator and forced Mussulmans to accept his idea of Pakistan is ridiculous because he had no arbitrary powers—only the force of his own personality.

He never made an emotional appeal to one's loyalty. He appealed to one's reason and put the case down in a clear and logical manner. I was to experience this when later he refused to let me accept the Government's nomination to the Pacific Relations Conference, but after he had succeeded in convincing me by cold reasoning, and I got up to leave, he said: 'One day you will go as the League's representative with honour and with the right to speak on their behalf.' He kept his promise. Within six weeks of establishment of Pakistan he appointed me a delegate to the United Nations. I could not go then as my youngest daughter Sarvath was only a few weeks old, so he sent me the next year. It is one of my greatest regrets that he did not live to tell me whether he thought his choice was justified, but all this was to come much later.

This was summer 1945 and the proposals Lord Wavell had put forward were under consideration. The proposals were that the power should be transferred immediately to Indian hands even before the war was over, and that other details should be worked out later. There were two hurdles to be overcome before it could be put into practice. The proposals had suggested that the entire personnel of the Viceroy's Council, except the Commander-in-Chief, should be Indians; and the Indians, were not to be chosen by the Viceroy but nominated by their own political organizations. The Viceroy, however, was still to keep some arbitrary powers, particularly in connexion with defence, law and order. It was on this question that there was an acute difference of opinion between the British and the Indian political parties; both the Congress and the Muslim League objecting to the Viceroy's retention of arbitrary powers. The second hurdle, and the one which really caused the breakdown of the negotiations, was the

division of seats between the Congress and the Muslim League. The Muslim League claimed that it alone had the right to nominate the Muslim members of the Viceroy's Council, while the Congress maintained that the Muslim League could not claim to be the sole representative of the Muslims, as it, the Congress, also had Muslim members in its ranks and therefore should also have the right to nominate at least one or two Muslim members in the forthcoming cabinet. Long and lengthy discussions were carried on, hours turning into days, and days into weeks, with no agreement being reached and the atmosphere becoming daily more tense and bitter.

Many people have accused Mr. Jinnah and the Muslim League of intransigence at this juncture. They say he should have conceded the point to the Congress, for although the Muslims in the Congress ranks could have been counted on the fingers of one hand, they were all men of distinction—this carried no weight with the Muslim League. Even so, had it been Maulana Azad or Mr. Asaf Ali, who were likely to be nominated by the Congress, the League might have given in. But it was known that the person who was to get this non-Muslim League Muslim seat was Khizar Hayat Tiwana, then Prime Minister of Punjab—a man whose name was already anathema to the Muslim Leaguers. The British favoured his nomination because he came from a family with a long tradition of devotion to the British; his war efforts in the present war had been considerable and the British felt they could not overlook his claim.

It was a pity that this was so and that just as power was to fall into new hands, the British should still cling to this old outmoded point of view and fail to realize that those who were to hold power in the new India and in the yet unborn Pakistan would be men chosen by the people and not those put on the *gadi* by the British. And so, after nearly three weeks of debate, of discussion lasting all day and late into the night, of meetings between people who could bring agree-

ment between leaders, the Simla Conference came to an end. It had failed, and we are too near it to be able to apportion the blame fairly. Probably the reason for its failure lies with all three parties; the British, the Congress and the Muslim League. Perhaps none of them had been as far-seeing and diplomatic as the occasion demanded of them.

As far as I remember, it was late in the evening that the official announcement came that the Simla Conference had ended in failure. Everyone more or less expected this, because the news for the last two or three days had been most disheartening. Yet I had gone on hoping for a last-minute compromise. The official announcement extinguished that last flicker of hope and I suddenly felt deflated and went about with that hollow feeling that comes after one has been living through a period of intense excitement.

But at that moment, Simla was seething with excitement, and though I was still young enough to be thrilled by it all, I was not quite oblivious of the growing tension between Hindus and Muslims which augured ill for the future. The *Hindustan Times* published a virulent article attacking me. Lady Chelmsford's Ladies' Club, the majority of whose members were Hindus but of which I had been a most active member for about twelve years, refused to invite me to a party they gave. My political activities had ceased to be merely something very exciting and wonderful for me personally. It had become a matter of public concern, which affected people's attitude towards me. It had begun to curtail my freedom of action, for while the Congress attacked me virulently for my active championship of the Muslim League, a whispering campaign had been started against me by recently joined members of the Muslim League for my continued friendship with such prominent Congress members as Mrs. Naidu and Mr. Asaf Ali. I began to realize that I had chosen to tread a very difficult and tortuous path and could not be sure where it would lead me.

CHAPTER XIV

The Gathering Storm

SOON AFTER this the Labour Party came to power in Britain. Many of its prominent members had been known to have sympathies with India and on coming to power were more or less pledged to give her independence. As a first step towards this end, general elections were to be held in India. The last elections had been held in 1937, nearly ten years ago, and during this period great political changes had taken place in the country. The most remarkable of these was the growth of the Muslim League, which now claimed to have the allegiance of ninety per cent of Muslims in India. The Muslim League was handicapped by the fact that its representation in the Legislature did not reflect this. Therefore the news of general elections was very welcome and both Congress and the Muslim League plunged into preparations in order to justify their previous claims to represent their country.

It was essential that the Muslim League should be able to substantiate its claims to represent the majority of Muslims in India. As opposed to Congress, it had had a very short time, a bare seven years, in which to educate public opinion in its favour and so it was with a certain amount of apprehension that the candidates for the Muslim League decided to contest the elections.

During these elections much work was done by students and by women. It was almost the first time that Muslim women *en masse* had taken part in political activity. For me it was an interesting and exhilarating experience. The election campaign was opened on the 27th January, 1946. I happened

to be in Calcutta then and attended the mammoth meeting in the famous Calcutta 'Maidan', addressed by my cousin, Shaheed Suhrawardy. I also accompanied him and my father in their first election tour, which was rather like a triumphal march. We went to Kharagpur, the big railway junction near our old home at Midnapur. We left by train from Calcutta and at every little station the train stopped, we met hundreds of people who crowned us with garlands, shouting League slogans. There was such a surge of enthusiasm among these people! They could not have understood many political details, but a new hope had been kindled in their hearts, a hope for a better world. It is a tremendous responsibility to have raised such a hope and not yet to have been able to fulfil it.

In Kharagpur, my cousin and father were taken out in procession throughout the town, and I went in another car to the house of one of the chief Muslim League workers. We were overwhelmed with hospitality. In my country, specially in small towns and villages, till this day visitors are really given a royal welcome. For whatever purpose they may come, or how many they may be and however long they may stay, the host never slackens his efforts to entertain them. This was no exception.

From the moment of our arrival to the moment of our departure, we met with nothing but kindness. There was a tremendous banquet prepared for that night, after which we all went to attend the meeting. It was the biggest political meeting that I had as yet attended. People for miles around had gathered there. There was the usual unfurling of the flag and singing, after which my father and my cousin both made very moving speeches in which they explained the significance of this election for the Muslims of India.

I was extremely surprised when I too was suddenly requested to speak. As yet, I had not addressed a mixed gathering, and this was not even mixed but almost exclusively male.

There were just twenty or so women behind the purdah among whom I also was sitting. When the request was made by the local Secretary, my father sent a message to me that I had better speak, otherwise they would feel hurt. I don't remember much of what I said. But I remember that I was feeling extremely moved at the sight of so much enthusiasm. The people seemed to be ready to make every sacrifice, and I felt that with such enthusiasm it was impossible for us not to succeed, and I was not wrong. We did succeed in achieving our objective. The people did not let us down. We asked them to unite to vote for the League and they did. It is we, the so-called leaders, who have not been able to redeem our pledge, the pledge that we gave them that if they did what we asked them to do, we on our part would be able to mitigate their sufferings.

One thing, however, this political struggle did achieve for us: it brought women into the forefront of public life. I have just mentioned the fact that the Secretary of the Muslim League himself requested me to speak at a political meeting. He was not a modern Westernized man, but the political struggle had somehow generated such enthusiasm that all old prejudices and taboos seemed to have been swept away. And so it was that, during this electioneering campaign, women worked in towns and in villages among every stratum of society, trying to get votes for the Muslim League. And men were grateful for their help and forgot their centuries-old prejudice, as they worked side by side to usher in a new era.

Soon after the Kharagpur meeting I came back to Delhi, and for the rest of the election campaign I remained there, working with other members of the Delhi branch of the All India Muslim League sub-committee.

But the Delhi election itself was not of great consequence to us. The most important election, the one on which all our interests were concentrated was the election of Liaquat Ali

Khan, the General Secretary of the Muslim League. His constituency was in the United Provinces, the most politically conscious province of India and the stronghold at once, of both the Congress and the Muslim League. Liaquat's election was symbolic. The Congress felt that his defeat would mean the defeat of the League and so put all their strength to achieving that end. We fought with equal zeal, and as the day of the results drew near, excitement mounted to fever pitch. The whole of the day on which the news was to come through, we kept telephoning the League office in Delhi. At last the news came through that he had won.

The most spectacular victory of the League, however, was in Bengal, the largest Muslim province in India, but one in which, though the Muslims were in a majority numerically; economically and educationally they were more backward. The Hindus of the province were not only head and shoulders above the Muslims in literacy and in wealth, but also in almost every other sphere, so the fight there was a very unequal one. In spite of this, we won because of the superior discipline and unity shown by the people, who were ably organized by Shaheed Suhrawardy. In this province, the Muslim League did not lose a single seat, thus securing an absolute majority in the Legislature.

As soon as the results of the elections were announced, Quaid called all the newly elected Muslim League members of the Legislature to meet in Delhi. This was called the Convention of the Muslim League and its purpose was to formulate the League's policy for the future. It differed from the Muslim League meetings of the past in this, that its members were elected by the people on Muslim League ticket and their claim to speak for the people could not be questioned by anybody.

The arrival of the members was awaited with great eagerness by the Muslim Leaguers in Delhi, who looked upon the Convention as a sort of celebration of our victory, for this

election was no ordinary election. On its results depended the future of a hundred million Muslims in India. It is for this reason that it was conducted with a crusading zeal, and its success was hailed with such delight.

The last to arrive and the most eagerly awaited were the contingent from Bengal. There were more than two hundred members from there, so a whole train had been engaged to bring them. It steamed into Delhi station, bedecked with flags and with League slogans chalked all over it. Even the engine had 'Muslim League Zindabad' chalked in big letters right round it. The platform was packed to capacity, and as the train was sighted the sky was rent with shouts of 'Allah-o-Akbar' and 'Muslim League Zindabad'. It was a proud moment for me as my cousin stepped out of the train and came up to where my father and I were standing and embraced my father, bending his head down as is the custom to receive his blessing. My father had come out of a nursing home to meet Shaheed; his fatal illness had begun, though as yet we did not know it.

The crowd pressed on us and was so dense that I felt I was going to suffocate. The meeting was to be held almost immediately, and therefore it was important to get to our car. How we ever reached it, I don't know, for it was impossible to walk. I was somehow propelled by the moving crowd, clutching desperately at my father's arm. After what seemed like ages we found ourselves at the exit of the station and in front of our car. We somehow got my cousin detached from the crowd and bundled him into the car to proceed to the meeting.

Having reached the place where the meeting was being held I went over to the women's enclosure. As it adjoined the platform, we could see and hear everything very clearly. This time, a very large area had been partitioned off for us, for political consciousness had grown to such an extent that it was expected that a large number would attend. That evening there was only to be the opening ceremony, always very

moving with its unfurling of the flag and reading of the Koran and today even more so. The important day, however, was tomorrow when the official resolution of the League, solemnly reiterating their demand for the establishment of Pakistan, was to be put forward by Shaheed Suhrawardy.

As soon as the meeting was over, I rushed home, as all the Party workers who had come with my cousin were staying in my house and I was anxious to see how they were faring. I had as usual a tent put in the grounds for them, for whenever my cousin stayed with me he brought at least half a dozen people with him. But this time the number seemed to be much more than that. In fact, about fifty people had arrived, tired, hungry, demanding refreshments and expecting to be looked after.

My servants had risen to the occasion manfully. Another tent had been rigged up to accommodate those who said it was necessary for them to stay at the same place as my cousin. Others were put in touch with the Muslim League Reception Committee office which arranged for their accommodation, but before they left all of them, fifty or more, were given tea and refreshment by my servants. I asked my bearer how on earth he had done it, for there was strict rationing still in force and I hardly had enough tea and sugar in the house for half a dozen extra people, let alone for a whole army. He replied he had borrowed from every house in the road, and added quite unconcernedly: 'I told them you would let them have it all back again.' I could not reproach him or point out how difficult, if not impossible, it would be for me to do that. I realized that he could not possibly have done anything else, for not to entertain guests is unheard of by our standards. Those who come to your house, no matter how large a number or what hour of the day, must be fed. Changing conditions of life are making the keeping of this tradition very difficult, but every effort is still made to try and keep this tradition of hospitality.

Under the Darkening Sky

MY LIFE in Delhi had now fallen into a familiar pattern. We lived in one of the Government-built houses which, if not distinctive, was very comfortable and had a nice large garden. I do not know of any part of the world where the climate is more healthy and invigorating than it is in Delhi in winter. The air is like a tonic, the rays of the sun like a caress and each part of the day has its special charm.

I remember the early mornings, when mist hung like a veil and dew lay sparkling like frosted glass. We would sit on our verandah, muffled in warm clothes, drinking steaming cups of tea, after which my husband would work in our garden and I would follow him round, trying to sound knowledgeable about vegetables. I love gardens, in fact I spent a large part of my time in them, but my knowledge of gardening, particularly vegetable gardening which is my husband's speciality, is very scanty, and however hard I try I find it difficult to distinguish between cabbage and turnip leaves.

Every day I spent the whole afternoon in the garden. The children rested on their brightly coloured *darees* and later played about in the shade. I lay under a tree, just my head in the shade and the rest of me soaking in the sun, with my books and writing material and knitting spread around me. I used to stay there till the afternoon light took on a mellow hue, and then I would get up and go inside and, after tidying myself a bit, go for a walk. The short winter's day would be drawing in and the air would be unutterably calm and full of wood smoke. I used to come back in the gathering dusk, and after a hot bath, sit beside the crackling fire. The children,

also fresh and sweet-smelling from their bath, would sit round me, warming their little hands and feet, and I would tell them stories. In a little while, my husband would come in and we would have the first hour in the day together with the children, for he was in the War Supply department and could never get away earlier than seven o'clock or seven-thirty in the evening.

There was much less official entertaining now that there was a war on, but a good deal more was done unofficially because there were many more people in Delhi than before. Delhi had become much more cosmopolitan. It was not only the headquarters of the Government of India's War Effort, but it had also become the stage of the most important political conferences that were taking place. Because of this, both English and Indian journalists were always present in large numbers, and most of the first rank official leaders, both of the Congress and Muslim League, were in Delhi as well. Efforts were being made to ascertain the political situation in India, and for this purpose both official and non-official politicians and writers from England were constantly visiting Delhi. They were all interesting people and interested in what was happening, and so I saw a great deal of them at parties.

Large buffet parties became popular about that time. They made service easier and one could have many more people. They were not as elegant as the sit-down dinners had been, but being more informal they were greater fun. There would generally be some music or singing or poetry recitations afterwards, and always a good deal of laughter and talk. We gave such parties regularly, but the part I enjoyed best was when most of the formal guests had left, and we would collect all the chocolates, fruit and sweets and bring them from the dining-room to the drawing-room, make up the dying fire and sprawl round it, nibbling at the nuts and sipping at left-over drinks, discussing the party.

We called this the 'Post-Mortem' and never held a party

without one. Very often the conversation would turn on serious matters. Then the discussion would get heated and would continue until late into the night.

Lunches followed the same pattern as the dinners, except that they were nearly always in the garden, but best of all were the breakfast parties. I liked these very much and gave them often myself. They would, of course, always be on a Sunday morning and naturally consist of people one knew very well. Nobody dressed up for them, in fact some of our friends who lived near enough came in their dressing gowns. We would all sit on the verandah leading from the dining-room, so as to be near the kitchen and be sure everything was piping hot.

At these breakfast parties, one ate enormously. We had sizzling *Parathas* with a sort of Indian scrambled eggs called *khagina*, or we had delicious *halwa puri* or *jalabi*, straight out of the frying pan, wrapped in dried leaves to retain their heat and moisture, and of course we ate *nehari*, the traditional breakfast dish of Delhi. It always had lots and lots of chillies and everyone's eyes would be streaming before they finished, but nobody ever stopped till the plate was empty. Then we ate thick clotted cream and carrot *halwa* to take away the effect of the chillies. By the time we had finished it all, there would hardly be room for tea, but of course we would drink it and, after that, sit chewing *pan* and talking in a desultory fashion for hours.

When there was not a breakfast party on a Sunday morning, there would always be a picnic in the afternoon. Delhi provided such ideal sites for picnics; each of the old historic buildings had beautiful rambling gardens and terraces, which commanded a magnificent view. Their gardens were so large that though there would be dozens of people, it would never appear crowded and one could always find a secluded spot.

At this stage, I feel I must say something about how wonder-

ful servants were in our country. They formed an important part of our background and it is they who made possible that life of leisured grace that we led. They were exceedingly well mannered, efficient, reliable and absolutely devoted to the members of the house they served, making the interests of their masters their own and accepting whatever they did unquestioningly, as the only right thing to do. If they worked with Europeans, they gave them the same unquestioning loyalty. They were not concerned with politics, their devotion was to their immediate masters and to nothing else.

This type of servant was becoming rare by the time I set up my house, but I was fortunate enough to have found a set that had many of these old-fashioned virtues, and I was consequently envied by my friends. There is no doubt that had I not been so fortunate I could not have given my time to political and social work as I did, for I am not one of those social workers who is indifferent to her home. I could go about canvassing votes for the Muslim League only if I was sure that my house was well run and that my children would be getting their meals on time.

But as it happened I could be sure of it, and not only this, any number of people could drop in at very short notice and I need have no qualms about it. I would walk into my kitchen, looking apologetic and saying that those three people who had come to see my father at ten-thirty were still there and looked as if they would be staying to lunch. The cook would serenely assure me that it would be all right and that he had realized this and had already added to the menu. After a while I was so sure of this that I would issue the invitation without even dashing to the kitchen to make sure that it would be all right.

It is not possible to have this type of servant or get this type of service any more, but in 1940-1947 in Delhi one could still keep a large staff, and though it had already become very expensive, food was still the cheapest item of expenditure. I am not thrifty by nature; I would rather do without

half a dozen *saris*, than waste my time doling out sugar and tea, or go marketing to check prices and so forth.

All my neighbouring housewives disapproved of me, and this made me feel guilty, but try as I would, I could not come up to their standards of efficiency. 'How much do you pay for chickens nowadays', I would be asked by one lady with that unmistakable aura of efficiency that surrounds good housewives. 'Oh, twelve annas', I would reply meekly, knowing full well that she would reply in a shocked voice: 'What! twelve annas! I get mine for ten', and then I would be treated to a minute description of the superior merits of her chicken.

Another would come with keys jingling at her waist, proclaiming her vigilance in household matters and no sooner would she be seated than one of my servants would come up asking for my keys and of course I would not be able to find them. I would make a frantic hunt for them, getting more and more nervous as I sensed the unspoken criticism of my guest, and finally one of the servants would find them in some unlikely place, such as behind the cushion on the garden chair. At this, my neighbour would not be able to restrain herself any longer and would say: 'If you are so careless with your keys, your servants could take them and help themselves to whatever they like.' 'Of course they could,' I felt like saying, 'and for that matter they could murder us all in our beds, but somehow or other they never do it.' But I never had the courage to say this.

In fact, it was years before I even had enough self-confidence to ignore these criticisms. Even now I can't help feeling guilty when one of these efficient women fixes me with a steely eye and demands to know what I pay for my coal or butter or meat or whatever it is. For the life of me I can't remember it, and even if I do it always seems to be too much! Once I tried to get over this difficulty by telling a lie. I quoted an absurdly low figure, but I got into more trouble this way,

for then the woman wanted to know the address of the shop from where I got my stuff. So I never dared try that again.

In the third year of the war, we did not go to Simla in the summer as usual. We discovered, however, that summer in Delhi—though very hot—had its compensations, such as sleeping out of doors under a clear, star-studded sky. The afternoons were long and very hot, but made bearable by closing all the doors and windows and fitting them with *khas* screens. *Khas* can best be described as sweet-smelling hay. It is plaited and made into screens which are then fitted in the windows and doors. They not only keep the rays of the sun out but, when moistened, give out a wonderfully refreshing fragrance. This can be said to be our way of air-conditioning, and I must say that it was very pleasant.

At six o'clock the doors and windows were thrown open, chairs, tables, beds and electric fans were all taken out into the garden. We forgot the heat of the day, as after a cold shower we sat and sipped ice-cool sherbet. It was during this time that moonlight picnics came into their own, and once again the wonderful historic buildings of Delhi proved an ideal setting for them. The dim outline of the old buildings made one feel pleasantly melancholy. So we sang sad love songs, or passionately nationalistic ones, recited poetry or played a game called *Baitbazi*, which is very popular with both old and young in our society. One needs to have a good memory for verse to be able to play it, for one has to cap the verse recited by the opposite party with another which should begin with the letter the last verse ended with. It is the sort of game which even the most literary people in the West would find difficult, but in our society, quotation is so much a part of our life that nearly everyone can play it with ease. To us, poetry is the substitute for opera, ballet and theatre. It is the very woof and warp of our life. We can truly be said to lisp in verse.

We read poetry all the time, we recite it and quote it without

any feeling of self-consciousness. We talk of the new verse that has come to our notice, as in the West one talks about the latest novel one has read, and one of the most popular social-cum-literary functions amongst us is the *Musharia*. That is a gathering in which poets read their latest compositions. It is done with a great deal of ceremony, for poets are very protocol-conscious. The recitation begins with the younger poets present, and goes in a very strict order of seniority. If a poet is called even one or two places out of turn, he would refuse to recite and may even be offended enough to leave the gathering. All the poems recited in *Musharia* have to follow the same metre and pattern, and the poets are informed of the pattern chosen beforehand. These days, however, this rule need not be strictly adhered to and poets are at liberty to read poems in verse and metre of their choice.

Living in Delhi, I had plenty of opportunity of going to *Musharias*, for there was always one on. Two or three times a year, there would be a grand *Musharia* arranged by some literary society, or under the auspices of one of the Colleges, but besides these there would be small gatherings in the houses of friends throughout the year, in which just two or three poets would be present. These were the most enjoyable ones.

The *Musharia* I went to most regularly and which to my mind had the full flavour of the old days, was held in the house of Khwaja Shafi, Khwaja Shafi, like Asaf Ali, was essentially a product of Delhi culture. Though a young man, he had the same courtly manners of the old world, and spoke the same chaste and fluent Urdu. His manner of giving praise to the poet was, in itself, so poetical that it was worth attending the *Musharia* only to listen to that. Syed Reza Ali was also one of those people who enhanced the interest of a *Musharia* by presiding over it, for as I have said before, there was a great deal of ceremony involved. There were unwritten rules about how one presided and what one said and how one said it, and yet within the formal framework there should be

spontaneity, and therefore not everyone was able to achieve it. Those who could, were as much in demand as good poets.

The most well known poets of this time were Josh, Jigar, Majaz, Mahirul-Qadri, Dânish and of course, Hafeez, and I had the opportunity of listening to them all. The most elusive amongst them was Josh. Nearly everyone who was arranging a *Musharia* would announce that Josh would be reciting, and people would flock to it. I myself spent much rationed petrol in this quest before I had the good fortune of listening to him. This was at a delightful informal gathering presided over by Mrs. Naidu in her own inimitable manner.

Delhi also provided opportunities for listening to some excellent *Quwwalis*. This is the nearest we come to a concert, that is to say music played and sung in chorus, for mostly our music is performed in solo. Shrines are the most appropriate settings for *Quwwalis* and as Delhi abounded in them, there was ample opportunity for listening to *Quwwalis*. The best known was held at Dargah Nizamuddin. It was famous all over India and people came each year from all parts of the country to listen to it. It lasted a week and at the end of it, one's head reeled with music.

During those years in Delhi, my life was full of varied interests and activities, which provided amusement as well as intellectual stimulation. And though there was a war on and we ourselves were in the grip of a national struggle, it did not seem to disturb the even tenor of my life in Delhi. That I would ever have to leave this city which I loved in its every mood, as one does a person, I never even dreamt. The frontiers of Pakistan had not been defined and it never entered our heads that Delhi would not be included within it. How sure we were that Delhi was ours and would come to us can best be illustrated by this incident. We were having a picnic on the terrace at Humayun's Tomb one afternoon, when my sister-in-law remarked: 'Do you think you will get Delhi if Pakistan is established?' My husband replied pointing to the domed

and turreted skyline of Delhi: 'Look at it—whom do you think it seems to belong to?' and Dina could not deny that the essentially Muslim character of its architecture seemed to proclaim that Delhi belonged to the Muslims. And so it did, in every way, except population. No, that is not true, even by counting the heads it would have been ours, had the dividing line come below and not above Delhi. But by dividing Punjab, our overall majority was lost, so we lost Delhi. And today its mosques and minarets join the mosques and minarets of Cordoba and Grenada in saying:

*Kè thay alé adnân say mairay bānee
Arab ki hoon main iss zamin pur nishani.*

The descendants of Arabs, they were, those who created me.
I stand here, a memorial to their vanished glory.

CHAPTER XVI

The Storm Breaks

THE FAILURE of the Simla Conference in the summer of 1945 caused tension and bitterness. Elections, following in 1946, further intensified this—one could feel it everywhere. Social relations between Hindus and Muslims which, up till now, had been free and easy, became increasingly strained. Things one had once done without thinking, now seemed to have political implications. For instance, Hindus had used *adab* and *khuda-hafiz* which are forms of greeting of Persian origin, but in common use among both Hindus and Muslims in polite society, particularly in U.P. Now their use was considered to be an indication of a pro-Muslim attitude.

Similarly the use of *tikka* (a red spot on the forehead, originally a caste-mark among Hindus but now used more or less for its decorative effect) by Muslim girls was frowned upon by the equally communal and narrow-minded Muslims. The atmosphere was becoming so charged with suspicion and hatred that one felt one could hardly breathe. Thinking men of every party were beginning to get alarmed.

And everyone began to realize the urgency of coming to an agreement soon. Now that the election results had clearly and unmistakably shown the Congress and the Muslim League to be the two political parties claiming the allegiance respectively of the Hindus and Muslims, Britain had to come to terms with them and somehow to reconcile their claims, so that a transfer of power might be possible.

For this purpose a Parliamentary Delegation composed of Lord Pethick Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and Mr. A. V. Alexander came out, bringing with them what came to

be known as the Cabinet Mission Plan. The subsequent division of the Indian sub-continent was based more or less on the proposals contained in this plan, though, at this stage, it was still hoped that it would not be necessary to follow it. But by conceding the maximum amount of autonomy to the Provinces, within a united framework, the claims both of Congress and the Muslim League would be met. And for a brief period that hope looked like being realized.

The members of the Cabinet Mission arrived in New Delhi in March 1946, when the hot weather was at its height, a time when the British Government normally used to retire to the mountains to escape the dust and heat of the plains. The arrival of the Cabinet Mission almost at a time when normally work tapered off, was itself significant of the fact that the British had realized the importance and urgency of solving the Indian problem. Sir Stafford Cripps and his colleagues, though they bravely tried to carry on during the gruelling heat of Delhi, soon found it impossible to continue and so had to retire to the heights of Simla, hoping that its cooler climate would be more conducive to cool and calm judgment.

Both Mr. Jinnah and Pandit Nehru went up to Simla as guests of the British Government and we followed the reports of their daily talks with the members of the Cabinet Mission with interest and anxiety. After what seemed like an interminably long period, though it could not have been actually more than a fortnight, it was announced that an agreement had been reached. It was such a relief after the last six months, during which time agreement had seemed to recede farther and farther. One hardly dared to believe that the miracle had happened and all the three contending parties had finally come to an agreement. But it seemed that this was so, for Mr. Jinnah was coming down to Delhi and had called a meeting of the All India Muslim League in order to announce to them his acceptance and to ask for their support.

It was on the 9th June, 1946, in the spacious hall of the

Hotel Imperial that this momentous session of the All India Muslim League was held. I remember Mr. Jinnah looking pleased and confident as he sat on the platform, overlooking the packed hall, I remember his speech almost word for word. He explained clearly and lucidly, as he was wont to do, the reasons that had led him to the acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan. I remember the end of his speech, when he said with a smile; 'They say that at last reason has dawned upon me. Well, that is a very good thing. I only hope that reason will also dawn on the leaders of the Congress.' And that is what all of us, hearing that speech, fervently and ardently hoped for, a dawn of reason, for all concerned in solving the problem on which the well-being of millions rested.

But this fervent hope was very short-lived. On the 9th June, I attended the League Council meeting. The next morning I left for Calcutta, for my father was very ill, and from now on, for the next year, while the dramatic struggle of the people of India was reaching its climax, I went through a period of great personal anguish and suffering. Because of this I ceased to be an active participant in the events that took place during this period, while the heightened sensitivity which comes with personal sorrow made me react to the suffering and tragedy around me more acutely. For this year in the history of India and Pakistan can truly be called a black year. The short-lived agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League had come to nought and thus resulted in the long pent-up tension and hatred breaking out into terrible communal riots all over the country. Calcutta, my home town, where my father lay ill, was the scene of the first of the terrible riots that were to break out in India with increasing ferocity during the next few months. My cousin, Shaheed Suhrawardy, was the Prime Minister of Bengal at this fatal hour and this made us, the members of his family, somehow feel more responsible for what was happening than we would perhaps have felt otherwise.

Once again we are too near the events, and many of the members of my generation are too personally concerned with it all, to take a really objective view of the horror that began on the 16th August, 1946; it lasted for four whole days, but the effects lasted for months and, in fact, can even be said to have lasted until today.

This briefly is what had happened since the 9th June, 1946. Congress had repudiated the agreement reached in Simla. It began by Pandit Nehru's statement in the Press on the 12th July that he had accepted nothing but the convening of a Constituent Assembly, to which the British would transfer power and then get out, after which all questions would be decided by the majority vote, which meant by the Hindus, as they were in absolute majority. It meant that none of the provisions regarding the division of power between the provinces and the Central Government could be taken as binding. That meant that Muslim majority provinces of Punjab, Bengal, Sind, N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan could not expect to be virtually autonomous, as proposed by the Cabinet Mission Plan, but could be subject to the Central Government in every detail. This statement of Pandit Nehru was preceded and followed by statements by other Congress Leaders. It created a wave of distrust among the Muslims, who reiterated the demand for Pakistan, saying that they could never hope to have a fair deal within a united framework. Another fateful meeting of the Muslim League Council was held, this time in Bombay, and many momentous decisions were taken at this session. The dramatic return of the British titles took place there. One by one, the prominent members of the Muslim League came up to the platform and pronounced the renunciation of their coveted titles and honours, bestowed by the British Government. Holders of the smallest to the highest of the British titles, from M.B.E. to the Knight Commander of the British Empire, one and

all were glad to be able to give this proof of their adherence to the League command.

So far the Muslim League had studiously refrained from getting involved in the virulent anti-British activities of the Congress. Mr. Jinnah's greatest achievement was that he had kept Muslims from losing sight of their main objective, which was to secure a fair deal in the free India. But it was now felt that the British, because of the Labour Government's well known partiality for the Congress, were deliberately bypassing the Muslim League. This was amply proved by their refusal to implement the Cabinet Mission Plan, even though the Muslim League accepted and stood by its commitments, because the Congress did not accept it. It seemed after all we would not get our rights through negotiation and would have to be ready for action. This was the gist of most of the speeches delivered in the Bombay session, and it was decided to hold a Direct Action Day when the future plan of action for the League was to be explained to Muslims all over the country.

It was on the Direct Action Day that the Calcutta riots broke out, and the Congress has always tried to fasten the blame for this on the Muslim League, but as far as I can judge the matter dispassionately I feel that this is not true. In fact, nothing was planned for Direct Action Day except large-scale meetings all over the country, and it was while the Muslims of Calcutta were attending such a meeting that the riot broke out, *not in* the area of the meeting, but in the areas of the unprotected homes of these people. And the carnage that took place during these first few hours, where women and children fell as completely helpless and defenceless victims, was greater than the subsequent retaliatory attacks by the Muslims on the predominantly Hindu areas.

I personally, however, do not think this sort of argument is a justifiable one. The riots in Calcutta were terrible, no matter whose the blame. The suffering they caused to thousands of

people shocked and horrified us all, and even though, since then there have been still more terrible riots (I have seen the victims of the East Punjab riot after Partition which made the Calcutta riots seem insignificant), I somehow have never been able to get over the shocked impact the Calcutta riots had on me.

It made me realize what a terrible responsibility we take on ourselves when we champion a cause and ask people to be ready to sacrifice and die for it. How few of us realize, as these words glibly pass our lips, what it actually costs people in blood and tears. I know that I at least have never again, after the Calcutta riots, been able to make a speech exhorting people to sacrifice. It seems too great a price to ask for lightly from a public platform. I feel only those who themselves are ready and willing to pay, or rather who have already paid, are entitled to demand this supreme sacrifice; for only then can we be sure that they have done, and can do, what they are asking others to do.

It was during this period, when the rioting was at its worst in Calcutta, that my father's illness also took a serious turn. It was very difficult in a riot-torn city to get proper medical attention for him. We lived in Park Circus, a residential area predominantly Muslim. The doctors, who were Europeans and Hindus, lived in other parts of the city. The hospital, where one had to go constantly for various check-ups, was in a predominantly Hindu area, and nurses lived in still another part of the town. My father's condition was already so serious that a few days' neglect could have fatal consequences and therefore, somehow or other, medical attention and nursing had to be secured. For two nights and a day, neither doctor nor nurse could come, for all communications were at a standstill.

I was also faced with the problem of feeding all the people who were staying in our house. We had a large number of servants. My two young cousins and their small child were

also staying in our house at that time, and now we had the two nurses and another child added to the household. All the shops were closed and we were more or less cut off from the rest of the town; so getting food presented a real difficulty. All of us who were well managed to live on boiled rice and *dhal* (boiled lentils), but in the case of my father it was necessary that he should have nourishing food. It was here that the poor people in the village tenements near us came to my aid.

These village tenements are a special feature of the city of Calcutta. Right in the middle of the most industrial part of the city, or in the heart of its residential district, one sees these village tenements which are known as *Bastis*. They are, for all intents and purposes, complete self-contained units and the people living in them have the same characteristics as our villagers. These *Bastis* had started to disappear under the new town-planning schemes, and ours would have gone too, but because of the war, many of these plans had been shelved. And at this moment I was certainly very glad of the proximity of these *Bastis*, though in the past at times I had deplored it. The people in their kindness, kept me provided with new-laid eggs, vegetables from their meagre little plots and even once let me have a whole chicken, and in this way I could tide over the worst period of food shortage.

We tried to keep the news of what was happening as much as we could from my father, but of course it was impossible to do so. Though he was very ill, his mind was perfectly clear and he insisted on listening to the radio, and so he knew exactly what was happening. It distressed me greatly to see his anguish, for my father was a man who really loved humanity and suffered for it. The fact that he was helpless and could do nothing to alleviate the misery of his people made him suffer all the more.

My father, throughout his political career, had never been virulently anti-British. He was by temperament a kindly

person and vehemence was alien to his nature. He had throughout his life tried to serve his country in a constructive and not in a destructive manner. His contribution towards its struggle for liberation had not been of a spectacular kind, but consisted of solid work in the fields of health and education. But when he heard the Muslim League resolution about returning the British titles, he immediately decided to act on it.

I remember that evening so well. I had gone downstairs to see my uncle, who came every day to inquire about my father's health, but as he was old and had heart trouble, he could not come up the stairs. When I came upstairs, Father told me that he had just listened to the radio, and in obedience to the Muslim League resolution, wanted to return his titles. He asked me if I would take down a letter to that effect. I hesitated to do so and said: 'Why, you never believed in such gestures. Why do you now want to do this?' 'It is all I can do', he said, and my heart seemed to break as I realized his utter misery at his helplessness. I tried to forestall his taking such a drastic step, but I should have realized that my father was not a man who, after having decided on a course of action, changed his mind. Next morning, when a young cousin of mine came to visit him, he got him to take down the letter renouncing his titles. This gesture, as a friend of ours so aptly said, was 'his last salute to the Muslim nation'.

Because my father could do nothing himself to help and serve the party, which at the moment was going through its most critical period, he insisted that I did whatever I could. At a short distance from our house was Lady Bra-bourne's College for Girls, which had now become one of the refugee centres. Truckloads of men, women and children were brought there daily from other parts of the town. Their homes had been burnt and looted. Many of their men killed, many more wounded, all of them were suffering from shock, none of them possessed anything but the clothes they stood

up in and sometimes even those were torn to shreds. I was later to see many more such people, to get used to them almost, but at this moment it was still unfamiliar enough to be an appalling shock. Those that were seriously wounded were taken to hospital, but there were many amongst them who had very bad cuts and who also had to be attended to.

Dozens of women among them had seen their menfolk dragged from their homes and killed before their eyes. Some of them were so numbed with shock that we could not even get them to move or eat or lie down. They sat looking into space with fixed vacant stares. It was terrible to see them. There were some who could give vent to their feelings by crying. Their wails were like Rachel's mourning for her children and they would not be comforted. Some of them had been separated from their husbands or children, who had been taken to another refugee centre. They were distraught and begged us to somehow try to trace their families. It was extremely difficult to do this, as everything was in such a state of chaos, but we tried to do what we could.

My young cousin, Begum Ahmad Suliaman, daughter of Shaheed Suhrawardy, and her husband were working day and night at this centre, and thought nothing of going through the most riot-ridden areas to rescue those who were trapped. And it was Begum Suliaman who went to the various police stations to try and trace the members of families who had got separated and bring them together. I will never forget the expression on the face of one of the refugee women when she got her three children back again. The oldest among them must have been about ten and the youngest was a few months old. The eldest child had looked after this baby, begging a little milk at the other refugee centre and feeding it by soaking cotton wool with milk and squeezing it into its mouth. The little baby did not look any worse for this method of feeding, and the joy of this family at being reunited was a sight to bring tears to the eyes. This woman had been stunned

by a blow on her head, and that is how her children had got separated from her. Her husband had been badly wounded and was in hospital, but later got better and was able to rejoin them.

But there were women whose entire families had been wiped out, husbands, brothers, sons, just leaving five or six defenceless women. What were we to do about these was the question that was to come later. At the moment, it took all our time and energy to feed and clothe these people somehow. Food was cooked in huge quantities by the men volunteers of the Muslim League Party, who also served the men refugees. But we, women volunteers, undertook to serve the women. It meant two or three hours of back-breaking work, and as soon as we had finished this, it seemed to be time for the evening meal and in between there were a hundred and one things to do.

Fearing an outbreak of cholera or smallpox, we tried to inoculate these people. Not having enough nurses or doctors to do this, those of us who had some sort of a first-aid training undertook to do this ourselves. All the work was organized and directed by Begum Suliaman, together with the group of ladies, most of them society women, who for the first time in their lives had come to do work of this kind. Later on, our women were to do much more than this and it explains how more or less overnight, they became social workers. The need was great; there was almost no choice. Whenever a challenge as tremendous as this faces a nation, it must rise up to meet the challenge or perish. Thank God, we were able to meet the challenge.

Our house itself had become a sort of refugee centre, because people from the village tenements would all flock to take shelter whenever there was a scare that rioters were coming. My father was very concerned that all those taking shelter in our house should be properly cared for. The first night that they came in, my father told me that they should

be given something to eat. 'But how can I,' I said aghast, 'we have hardly any food in the house.' My father paused for a minute to think, and then told me that in one of the store-rooms there were some large canisters of tea that he had brought from Darjeeling some time ago. Would I go and take these canisters out and at least give these people some tea.

I did as he told me, and in the same room found a samovar which, I remembered, was used in election days for making tea for the voters. So I had this samovar taken downstairs and handed over the making and distributing of tea to one of the village headmen who did the job very efficiently. This was the month of Ramadan and most of these people had been fasting the whole day and had had nothing to eat, even after breaking the fast. So the hot cup of tea was very welcome.

This became a daily occurrence while the scare continued, and even after this, when they no longer came to the house in the evening, I would get constant requests for help. A woman would come to say that her husband, who had gone out working in the morning, had not yet returned, and she feared that he might have been wounded or killed; would I try and find out what had happened. And either my cousin Begum Suliaman or I would telephone the police station and hospitals and try to trace the whereabouts of the person, and more often than not, he would turn up safe and sound later in the evening, at best having been delayed by a rowdy crowd.

I used to try and keep things from my father as much as I could, but as I tried to spend as much of my time with him as possible, he always found out when any such request had come to me, and he often told us what was the best way to help. One day, feeling rather irritated by these constant demands on my time, when I felt I had more than enough on my hands, I said: 'Why can't these people go to so and so for help', mentioning the names of our neighbours. 'They are also influential people and should be able to help.' My

father was deeply shocked by this remark of mine. For a minute he looked up at my face and I could clearly see the surprise in his eyes, that I should have said something so contrary to the creed he had tried to bring me up in. He said, 'My dear, it has always been the tradition of your house to help other people', and then sighed gently, closed his eyes and turned over.

Many a time during the last few years, when I have felt the same sort of mounting irritation and have thought: 'Why can't such and such a person do something, or why should I always be bothered', I have remembered that scene in the sickroom of my father and heard his voice saying those words to me in the gathering twilight.

The actual rioting, the killing, the looting and the burning stopped after five days or so, but the dislocation that it had caused continued for days, indeed for months. Not only this, almost every other day there would be a scare, a false alarm or an actual instance of stabbing or arson, which would result in shops closing or traffic coming to a standstill for several hours at a time. My father's condition was deteriorating so rapidly now that the doctors felt that it was too much of a risk for him to continue staying in the house, because there was no certainty of medical aid reaching him when it was critically necessary. Colonel Pasricha, the Director of the School of Tropical Medicine, where father's check-up was being carried out, said to me, 'I am prepared to turn your house into a hospital, give you oxygen cylinders, blood transfusion equipment, everything that is necessary, but what I cannot guarantee is my doctors and nurses getting to your house in time of necessity, if there is a sudden outbreak of violence, and therefore I beg you to bring your father over to my hospital.'

In my country, people who have got homes and dear ones to look after them do not go to hospitals. It is considered *infra dig*. We have still a conservative society's prejudice against

institutions, and when one is seriously ill and chances of getting well are remote, one never goes to hospital, because together with the ordinary distrust of going to hospital there is a sort of religious prejudice against it as one would be surrounded in one's last moments by doctors and nurses who were of another faith, and one would not perhaps have an opportunity of receiving religious consolations.

It was therefore very difficult for me to decide to take my father to the hospital. My aunts, that is my father's sister and sister-in-law and my mother's aunt looked aghast at me. 'What! Take him to the hospital in this condition!' and I could read what was in their minds. I was torn with conflict and did not know what to do, but my cousin Shahid, who throughout my father's illness had been a source of spiritual and physical strength to me, helped me to make up my mind on this issue also. 'You must not pay heed to meaningless convention, my dear. You must try and do everything that you can to prolong your father's life', and so it was that I decided to take my father to the School of Tropical Medicine. We were there only for a week. It was a week of great loneliness and trial for me, but during it I met with the greatest of kindness, consideration and sympathy from the entire hospital staff, nearly all of whom were Hindus. I mention this specifically because I am truly and deeply grateful to them for having been so good to me. I am particularly grateful to them, not only because their kindness made my ordeal bearable, but because of it I can look upon these days without any feeling of bitterness, and I am glad that it can be so, for bitterness had no part in my father's philosophy of life.

CHAPTER XVII

The Year Between

MY FATHER died in September, 1946 and Pakistan was established as a sovereign independent State on the 14th August, 1947. The year between was one full of momentous events, and for me a year of much personal worry and anxiety.

A Central Interim Government, consisting of representatives of the Congress and Muslim League, had been formed soon after the Calcutta riots, but it was not a coalition Government, because the two parties had not agreed on a common policy. They had come together only for the purpose of seeing that their separate points of view should get translated into action. It was hoped that working together might bring about a better understanding and result in a compromise. This hope, however, was not fulfilled, and though the representatives of the two major parties continued to sit round the same table, trying to tackle the various problems that confronted the nation, the bitterness amongst their people continued to grow. The Calcutta riots were followed by still more terrible riots, lasting for a much longer period, covering a much greater area and taking the toll of many more lives.

The first of these was the Bihar riot. Bihar is a province between Bengal and the U.P. It was a predominantly Hindu province with a Muslim minority of eight per cent. It was a province that had retained much of the old-world charm and its people, particularly its villagers, were noted for the gentleness of their manner. It therefore shocked everyone profoundly when the people of this province suddenly ran amuck and

indulged in an orgy of killing and burning. The population of Calcutta consisted of Hindus and Muslims in almost equal proportion. The Muslims were in fact in a minority. They were about forty-eight per cent, but as there was a Muslim League Government in power, the Hindus insisted that the riot had been instigated by the Government and therefore were determined to take revenge for it. As a result the Bihar riots were planned. And the Hindu population being in absolute majority, the Muslims, particularly in the villages, were more or less wiped out. It was estimated that after the riots the total Muslim population of Bihar was much reduced. The area covered also was enormous. The whole of the province was affected, and the riot continued unabated for nearly a month. Pandit Nehru, who had already become Prime Minister, rushed to the scene, as also did Gandhi, and there is no doubt that they tried to stop the carnage, but their efforts did not meet with much success.

The riots in Bihar were followed by equally terrible riots at Gurmakteshar, on the occasion of a Hindu festival. This festival took place annually on the bank of the river Jumna. How terrible the riot was can be gauged from the fact that it is said that the water of the river seemed to have been turned into blood. On this occasion also the victims were Muslims, and the riot was a planned one, calculated to strike terror in our hearts. But unfortunately it did not have that effect. A wave of indignation passed through the entire Muslim population of India and caused riots to break out in Noakhali, a district in Bengal with a predominantly Muslim population. Here the victims were the hapless Hindu minority.

These successive riots alarmed the British, who feared a complete breakdown of the Governmental machinery, and decided to transfer power before that could happen. Lord Wavell was then the Viceroy of India, a man of high moral principles, great integrity of character and honesty. He refused to undertake such a task in a hurry, he was therefore

recalled and Lord Mountbatten, who had a reputation for getting things done, was sent out as the last Viceroy of India, for the express purpose of liquidating the Empire.

There is no doubt that the increasing lawlessness in India alarmed the British, but it was not this that made them decide to quit India. There had been rioting and civil disturbances in India before, and they had managed to quell them and remain there. But something else had happened as the war came to its close which made the British realize that the time had come for them to leave. This was the I.N.A. trials and the reaction they had the length and breadth of India.

The I.N.A., or the Indian National Army, consisted of the Indian prisoners of war in Japan, who had been released by the Japanese Government on their having given up their allegiance to the British. These had been formed into a National Army of Liberation under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose, a Congress Leader, who had escaped to Japan. Some of these men may have actually fought against the British troops but most of them had been kept in reserve for such time as the Japanese hoped to invade India, when these men would have been most useful to them. After the Allied victory these men were naturally brought to trial as deserters, this made them heroes overnight in India. So many things have happened during these last years that many people have forgotten the importance and significance of the I.N.A. trials, but there is no doubt that it was one of the deciding factors which made the British leave India.

I was fortunate enough to manage to be present at the trials of three of the I.N.A. Officers. It seemed as if I was watching a dramatic play. The atmosphere was charged with emotion, the fact that the trials were being held in the Red Fort of Delhi added irony to the situation. And among the lawyers who had been elected to defend the accused, were not only the most famous names in the Indian legal profession,

but the most prominent in the political field as well. Pandit Nehru himself was among them, and I am almost certain that if this was not his first appearance, it was certainly the first in thirty years in the role of a barrister. Asaf Ali, Katju and Desai were the other bright stars in the galaxy. They looked most impressive as they walked in and took their place opposite the prosecutors.

I cannot remember what the prosecution case was, I know that it was a brief one, after which Desai got up and opened the case for the defence. Desai, who was known as the silver tongued orator, spoke for two whole days and he brought the full battery of his eloquence to bear upon the case. I could not judge its legal merits, but as a piece of oratory it was superb. As he ended his speech with the words, 'If it be treason to try and break the shackles of foreign rule, then these men are traitors; if it be treason to adopt whatever means presents itself to free one's country from hated foreign rule, then these men are traitors; if it be treason to work to free one's country from bondage, then these men are traitors, and not only these men, all of us are traitors. All of us, every man, woman and child in India, are today working for the same end.'

There was such tension in the atmosphere that one could almost feel it. Desai had expressed what, rightly or wrongly, was felt about the I.N.A. by everybody in India. I say rightly or wrongly, because in this matter issues were not clear cut. There is no doubt that according to ordinary normal criteria of conduct, the action of the I.N.A. could not be considered anything else but treason. There was not an exactly comparable case with the ordinary civilian. They had chosen to wear the King's uniform. They had taken up arms to fight for one cause and then decided to change sides. But such was the atmosphere in India at that time that it was impossible for anyone to see or think clearly. The British in realizing this showed great perspicacity, because when people get to the

stage when they cease to differentiate between right and wrong in their struggle, they have reached a dangerous point, and to try and hold them down further could only mean disaster. The British Government were wise not to have tried to do the impossible.

We heard on the radio in February, 1947, that the British Government had decided to transfer power, and that Lord Louis Mountbatten was coming over to put the decision into effect. The work of transferring power was expected to be completed by June, 1948. We heard this announcement sitting in our drawing-room in New Delhi, and after it was over the room seemed suddenly very quiet. The régime, under which we had been born, and to which we had grown accustomed, was to be changed; and even though we may have wished for it, and I, in a small way had worked for it, it was a bit frightening now that it was actually going to take place.

I went to see the procession of the Mountbattens arriving in New Delhi, because I knew that it would be the last viceregal procession that I would witness. Soon after their arrival, I left New Delhi and so I missed getting to know the Mountbattens, whose extraordinary conduct in the last year of the British rule in India has made them the most controversial figures amongst the long list of royal representatives that have graced the Viceregal Lodge. I also missed the exciting and the momentous events attendant on the last phase of transfer of power to our hands.

I went to Nagpur to attend the wedding of my husband's nephew. A period of great personal worry and anxiety followed. My eldest daughter became very ill and her condition gave me cause for anxiety for months. Her illness coming so soon after my father's death worried me much more than it would otherwise have done. The strain of it affected my health. My baby was born prematurely and was so weak that it further added to my anxiety, and so it happened that while a revolution was more or less taking place around me I was

so engrossed in my personal worries that I was hardly aware of it. My husband had become a member of the Partition Committee, which had been set up to carry out the onerous task of dividing the country, and except for making frantic telephone calls from Delhi was unable to help me in any way.

Pakistan was established on the 14th August, 1947. My baby was barely three weeks old, and it was impossible for me to travel. I longed to be in Karachi and to take part in the joyful celebrations that were taking place there, but I could not do so.

The children, however, made little green flags themselves and went up and down the long verandah, singing Pakistani songs and shouting, 'Pakistan Zindabad'. This was all the celebration we could manage on this long-awaited day.

The next day was the 15th August, the day of the Indian Independence. Since the Calcutta riots, things had never been normal in Calcutta, and for the last few weeks as the day of the Independence drew near, tension had reached fever pitch. It was rumoured that Hindus meant to wreak their vengeance on the Muslims on the day. This was no idle rumour, there was concrete proof that a large-scale disturbance was being planned. That it did not take place is almost a miracle, and this miracle was brought about by the superhuman efforts of Gandhi and my cousin Shaheed Suhrawardy.

Gandhi was proceeding to Noakhali, to be there in case fresh rioting should break out. He had to pass through Calcutta to go to Noakhali. My cousin met him at the station and said to him that it was Calcutta and not Noakhali he was needed at. My cousin, who was still the Prime Minister of the whole of Bengal, said he knew exactly what the condition was in the various parts of the province, and it was not in Noakhali but in Calcutta that trouble was brewing, and by staying here Gandhi could stop a flare-up. Gandhi said he would agree to stay on and do what he could, provided my cousin agreed to work with him.

Agreeing to work with Gandhi meant, of course, agreeing to work in his way. In this case, it meant going and staying in a mud hut in the poorest and the most badly affected part of the town, eating vegetarian food and following the routine that he followed. This must have entailed a lot of discomfort for a person like my cousin who was used to a very different sort of life, but so great was his desire to prevent another holocaust that he agreed to these conditions and carried them out meticulously for over a fortnight. It also meant facing much physical danger; several attacks were made on his life, and his car was blown up by a hand grenade, but he persisted in the task he had undertaken.

Gandhi and Shaheed Suhrawardy started their crusade for peace together on the 11th August. They went to different parts of the town and held meetings in which they exhorted people to be worthy of the new independence that was coming to them, and asked Hindus to treat Muslims as their brothers and asked Muslims to think of Hindus in the same way. They sent volunteers in lorries shouting peace slogans all over the city, and somehow managed in three or four days to ease the tension and bring out an upsurge of goodwill. For on the 15th August, the day that was dreaded, Hindus and Muslims instead of killing each other fraternized together and celebrated the coming of independence joyfully. It was a wonderful achievement and I am proud of the part my cousin played in it. I think that in his long record of public service, there is nothing else that matches this. On this occasion he showed courage, boldness and most of all, a real concern for the people's welfare.

This act of my cousin was misconstrued by his enemies and eventually cost him his career in Pakistan, though in actual fact this was not only an act of service to Muslims in Calcutta, whose elected representative he had been for twenty-seven years, but also a great service to the newly established State of Pakistan. For if he had not acted in the way he did, riots

would have broken out in Calcutta also, in which case Pakistan would have had to cope with an influx of refugees on both its fronts.

It took all Pakistan's resourcefulness to deal with five million refugees that poured into West Pakistan within the first three months of its establishment. That it could stand up to this terrific strain is incredible, a proof of the courage and determination of its people. But it is doubtful if even their superhuman courage and determination could have withstood a double attack. Even if it could have done so, the strain would have been terrible, and Shaheed deserved gratitude, not censure, for having prevented the catastrophe. But such is the way of politics that this, his greatest act of service, was misconstrued as an act of disloyalty.

As conditions in Calcutta improved, disturbing news began to come through from Punjab. The very day after the Partition, Sikhs and Hindus together had started a systematic massacre of Mussulmans in East Punjab. All the villages had been destroyed and men, women and children in thousands, killed. This had started such a panic and terror in the hearts of people that within a few days millions were trekking their way from East Punjab into West Punjab.

The riots had now spread to Delhi and terrible things were happening there. Gandhi, on hearing this, left for Delhi, to try and do there the same wonderful work he had done in Calcutta.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Promised Land

I ARRIVED in Karachi on the 17th September, 1947. It had taken me nearly a week to come from Calcutta as I had to travel by boat. The trains had all stopped because of extensive rioting in East Punjab. The railway lines had been pulled out, and such havoc created, that the train service in this area had not yet been resumed. It was already getting dark when the 'Bamora' sailed into port and I was at last in the promised land. The passengers had all assembled on the deck, straining their eyes to catch a glimpse of the shore, and as soon as it was sighted the cries of 'Allah-O-Akbar' rent the air. As the boat drew nearer, we could see hundreds of people on the shore. These were the refugees who had fled to Pakistan in the last few days and were still squatting in ship-yards, beside railway stations and round about the airport. They welcomed us with resounding slogans, and for about fifteen minutes one could hear nothing but those cries of exultation and triumph and hope. In the midst of it, the ship docked and we disembarked. As it had already grown dark, I could not see much of Karachi on my drive home to Clifton.

Next morning, I got up feeling strange and unfamiliar, for I had not been to Karachi before and found it very different from the parts of India I had lived in. Then a flood of realization swept over me that I was in Pakistan. Actually in Pakistan, the land of promise, the land of hope, the land for which thousands had sacrificed their lives and were still doing so.

We had been given a house in Clifton, a suburb of Karachi. In 1947 there were very few houses in that area and we felt

cut off from the town and its activities. So, as soon as I could I went into Karachi to look at the city which was now going to be my home. I saw the flag fluttering from the Government House and realized that it was now inhabited by Mr. Jinnah. I, who for years had avoided calling at Government House, immediately went in and signed my name in the visitors' book with a flourish. I beamed at the policeman and the A.D.C.s, for all these appurtenances to the British Raj had now become the symbols of our own sovereignty. We were now a nation and a state, the realization went to my head like wine. It made me feel as if I was walking on air.

But there was no time to indulge in ecstasy or joyful celebrations, for the price paid for Pakistan was very great indeed: no less than five million people had been uprooted, many thousands of whom had been killed, their houses looted and their womenfolk raped. Now they trekked their way to the newly established State. This had begun twenty-four hours after Pakistan came into existence, and before the State was more than a few days old it had to face the alarming task of absorbing five million people. That it could do so was a miracle, a miracle made possible by the grace of God and the determination and endurance of our people. The super-human endurance of millions of refugees in the face of unparalleled misery, and the grim determination of those at the helm of affairs to surmount the unprecedented difficulties that faced them, are equally praiseworthy, and have evoked the admiration and wonder of people in all parts of the world.

What the world has not understood yet is why it came about. Why should one hundred million Muslims in India have decided to carve out a state for themselves at the cost of such terrible suffering? This has not yet been understood by the world at large, for no one has taken the trouble to understand the particular psychology of the Indian Muslim. Things have happened so quickly that there has been no time to understand their motives.

I have often heard people say: 'Isn't it remarkable that in the brief period of seven years, Jinnah put forward the idea of Pakistan, had it accepted by the people and sanctioned by the British?', but that is not so. It is true the demand for Pakistan was made only seven years before it was established, but this demand only gave concrete expression to the dream of the Indian Muslims to have 'a local habitation and a name'. This dream they had cherished since 1857 when the last vestige of their rule in India came to an end. But I must go back farther than that in order to explain it all.

Muslims had come to India as conquerors and for eight hundred years had ruled the country. During this period, they had settled down and married and accepted many of the customs of the land of their adoption, but had never become absolutely one with the people of the country. The reason for this continued detachment lay in the religion these people followed. It baffles Westerners that it should be so, but the fact remains that religion did make different people of them, influencing their way of life and their pattern of thought. Hinduism had hitherto absorbed most other conquerors, but the clear-cut tenets of Islam defied amalgamation with any other creed. As well as the rigid caste system of the Hindus, which prevented any possibility of free social intercourse, there was also the gulf separating the rulers from the ruled. And though in the case of the Muslims and Hindus, the gulf was not as great as between the British and the Indians, it still existed.

When the Muslim rule in India was succeeded by the British, the basic difference between the two peoples did not disappear. If anything, it grew stronger. The Muslims felt themselves threatened both by the supremacy of the British as rulers and by the numerical superiority of the Hindus, and in order to preserve their separate entity they held more tenaciously to their own way of life, and to every little thing that made their culture different from the Hindus. These

differences may seem trivial to an outsider, but to the Muslims they were like sentinels guarding their separate existence in a sea of aliens.

After some years of British rule, a new nationalism was born which was the result of Western education and the product of Western thought, and under its influence for the first time the Hindus and Muslims came together for the attainment of a common objective which was the independence of India through constitutional methods. But this type of nationalism had no mass appeal because the very language of parliamentary democracy that it used, was unfamiliar to the common people. No doubt in time it would have succeeded, but the process would have been a slow one. It would also have been a peaceful one and in the long run would have saved a great deal of pain and suffering, but this did not come about. Many things stopped the evolution of nationalism of this Western pattern, and it would take too long to recall them here.

With the advent of Gandhi, the whole character of the national movement changed. He gave it at once a mass appeal by introducing a quasi-mystic element into it. At the same time, it took on a more definitely Hindu colour, compared with the earlier nationalist movement which had aimed at ironing out the differences between the two communities and forging them into a nation in the Western pattern. The Gandhian national movement also advocated non-violent non-co-operation as the method and kept the achievement of parliamentary democracy in the Western pattern as its object. But neither the end nor the means used to attain it appealed to Muslims as a whole, for they were indifferent to the Gandhian doctrine of *Satyagarha* (passive resistance) and *Ahimsa* (non-violence) nor could they really understand all the talk about 'separate electorates, reservation of seats, minorities and weightage'. None of this talk succeeded in creating any enthusiasm among the Muslim masses. But they could

understand, visualize and thrill to the idea of a separate state of their own, and that is why the idea of Pakistan, from the minute it was put forward, caught their imagination.

So great was the enthusiasm for this idea that all the difficulties that lay in its way were ignored, all the sacrifices that would have to be made to bring it about were unheeded and all the contradictory factors of the case were lost sight of. We did not realize that it would mean sacrificing the very centres of our culture, the very monuments of our glory, the area that had been the cradle of our civilization. But although no one realized what price would have to be paid for the realization of this dream, when the time came for its payment, it was paid—almost without regret.

This attitude, then, explains the superhuman effort that the people of Pakistan made in the first weeks of its existence. They were fired by the desire to make this State of theirs succeed against all odds. For it was something for which they had waited subconsciously for nearly a century. People in every walk of life were dominated by this one idea: somehow to help their State to survive. For this end, a handful of officials worked twenty-four hours a day in offices that lacked tables and chairs, typewriters and stationery, that had neither pen nor paper, that in fact were bare of all office equipment. Officers sat on packing cases and wrote orders on backs of used envelopes. No one grumbled, no one minded the discomfort, no one grudged the long hours that they were required to put in, for they realized that they were making history.

Post offices were short of stamps, railways were short of fuel and yet somehow they continued to function, because of the initiative and resourcefulness of the men in charge, who were mostly young men with very little experience but a tremendous faith and belief in themselves and in the cause that they had elected to serve. Business and commerce were completely disrupted. These had always been the preserves

of the Hindus, and no one in Pakistan knew much about these matters, but somehow courage and enterprise took the place of experience and knowledge, and the gap was bridged.

Refugees in their millions were looked after, fed, clothed, nursed, and a large proportion of them rehabilitated, in record time. It was in this task that the women were of greatest help. Society women, who until now had done very little work of any sort, spent hours at refugee centres. They worked in groups and individually and did all they possibly could. They dressed wounds, they collected soap, iodine and bandages, and took them round to those in need. They tried to keep the refugee centres clean and as the cold weather approached, adding further hardships to the lot of the refugees, they went from door to door to collect blankets and warm clothes. I can say without exaggeration that there was not a house left in Karachi that winter, where anybody, however rich, had more woollen clothes than he absolutely needed. Everything that could be spared had been given.

There was no rest, no relaxation in our efforts for the first few months, but gradually things began to improve. The influx of refugees slowed down, the Government machinery began to work more smoothly and surely, and we felt that we had weathered the storm. So far there had been no functions, for no one had the time or the inclination for them. But by now we had ambassadors from more or less all the great countries, so parties had to begin, the first of them being given to the Diplomatic Corps by the Foreign Office.

Christmas Day was drawing near, which also happened to be Quaid's birthday. For the last few years, the Muslim League had celebrated it with much ceremony, and now that Pakistan was established, we thought that we should celebrate it with all the more *éclat*. The idea was ours, that is, the women's. The officials at first smiled at it, but later when they agreed to our suggestion, their arrangements for it left nothing to be desired.

In the morning, there was a parade. We have had much bigger ones since, for at that time we had very little to show, but I have never felt so proud as when those small contingents of our Army, Navy and Air Force smartly marched past while Quaid stood proudly taking the salute, with the Service Chiefs by his side. It underlined the fact that we had truly become a Nation.

In the evening there was a reception at the Prime Minister's and a State Banquet at the Governor-General's house, but the function that was the grand finale of it all was the banquet held at Sir Ghulam Hussain, the Governor of Sind's, house the next evening. Sir Ghulam Hussain and Lady Hidayatullah were known for their wonderful parties and lavish hospitality and on this occasion they had excelled themselves. The whole of the Governor's house was ablaze with light, the table groaned under the plates of food, men looked smart in their uniforms and women resplendent in gorgeous dresses and beautiful jewellery. Everybody felt gay and happy and in a festive mood.

Towards the end of the evening, we all gathered in the spacious hall to drink Quaid's health. I can see the scene so clearly in my mind, Quaid sitting in the middle of the room on a sofa, relaxed and happy. By his side was Lady Hidayatullah. All of us gathered round in a semicircle, holding glasses of ruby-red pomegranate juice in our hands, and a group of lovely girls, led by Pasha Haroon, standing opposite Quaid and singing a song, which had as its refrain: 'May you live long, O Quaid-i-Azam', It was a very stirring song and one with a very catchy tune, and soon all of us were joining in the chorus and the walls of the Governor's house were echoing with the refrain: 'May you live long, O Quaid-i-Azam'. And though Quaid did not live for very long after this, I do not think that our prayers went unanswered . . . for he lives as long as Pakistan lives.

CHAPTER XIX

From Purdah to Parliament

IN FEBRUARY, 1948, I took my seat in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. I had been elected to the Constituent Assembly of India in 1946 during the brief period of agreement between Congress and the Muslim League, but as the agreement had broken down almost immediately, the Muslim League told its members not to take their seats in the Constituent Assembly of India and consequently I had not taken part in it. When partition had been agreed upon, I was again elected to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, but as the period of both my elections had been one of great personal worry for me, I had hardly realized the importance of what had happened. Sitting in the Assembly chamber on that morning, however, the full realization came over me and I was awed to think that I should be amongst those who had been chosen for the proud and onerous task of framing the Constitution of my country.

A hush fell over the room as the Secretary announced the President. The *chaprassi* lifted the curtain behind the presidential chair and Mr. Jinnah stepped on to the platform. We all rose to our feet, Mr. Jinnah bowed ceremoniously and we returned the bow, and then resumed our seats. One by one, the members were called to come up to the platform and take their oath of office. When my turn came I went up with my heart beating and my knees trembling, I somehow climbed the three steps of the platform. The Secretary handed me the card on which the oath was written for me to read. After I finished taking the oath, Mr. Jinnah smiled at me encouragingly, rose, shook hands and said a few words, after which I walked

across to the other side and climbed down. For the next half hour, this continued, member after member went up, took his oath, shook hands with Quaid and returned to his seat. There was a great solemnity about the occasion, and though later many of us were to forget it, at that moment, under the eagle eye of Quaid, all of us were much aware of the greatness and importance of our task.

After the oath had been taken, a member from Bengal got up and moved a resolution, suggesting that the Constituent Assembly should meet once in Karachi and once in Dacca. Discussion followed and I, forgetting my nervousness, joined in. I supported the idea whole-heartedly, pointing out the great benefits that would come of it. The Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan got up to reply, and looking at me said in mock horror: 'Women never understand practical difficulties', to which I retorted: 'If we had, we would not have got Pakistan today', and so my parliamentary career began.

I was to remain a member of Parliament for nearly seven years, and these years were full of interest and activity. Our Parliament had a dual function, of framing the Constitution and carrying out the day-to-day legislature. I was very ignorant and it took some time to understand the Parliamentary procedure, but once I had done this, it was like taking part in a large-scale debating society. With this difference only—on the result of the debate depended the fate and welfare of millions. It was a tremendous responsibility and in all my years as a member, I felt overwhelmed by it. For by either supporting or opposing a motion, or by putting forward a resolution and getting it carried through, one could do such great good or countenance a great evil.

The Assembly met two or three times a year and its total sitting time was not much more than three months, but being a member of the Assembly meant that one's time was always at the disposal of the people. Everyone with any sort of grievance or any idea on any subject, had a right to come and

see one, and as I was particularly concerned with the refugees and with education, there was a great deal that could be done and said about these matters. I soon found that I did not have a moment to spare. Besides this, there were endless requests to me to make speeches, preside over societies and take part in charitable organizations. Before I realized it I had become a member of no less than a dozen societies, besides being a member of semi-governmental organizations such as the Red Cross, the Anti-Tuberculosis Society and the U.N.A.C.

During this period I was sent as a delegate to several International Conferences as well, including the Third Session of the United Nations in Paris in 1948. In 1951 I was invited, by the State Department of the United States, to study educational institutions and was given opportunities to speak about Pakistan. It was all very interesting and, at the same time, a great strain; for besides all this I had my home to run and my children to look after. I was not prepared to neglect these, not only because I considered it to be my first duty but because I really enjoy being at home and seeing that it is well run, comfortable, and a place where my family and friends like to be.

I also love being with my children. They were now at a most interesting stage, and I did not propose to miss watching any of the fascinating process of their growing up. I also felt that I was somehow on trial, that all eyes were on me, waiting to see if it were possible to combine a home and a career, and if I failed it would have an adverse effect on other women's chances of doing the same.

I tried very hard not to fail.

In order to get through my day's work I learnt not to take more than five minutes to dress, to give up the pleasure of shopping or even of window shopping, to never curl up on a sofa with a book whenever I wanted to, or visit a friend in mid-morning for a cup of coffee and gossip. In the dust and strife of life in Parliament I often longed for the peace and leisure

of the days in purdah. But there could be no turning back, no return to the secluded and sheltered existence of the past. I had to continue on this new road on which the women of my country had set out, in which one could taste the joys of achievement as well as the bitterness of failure, to know both hope and fear, disillusionment and attainment. And who can deny that this is a richer, fuller and a more rewarding way of life?